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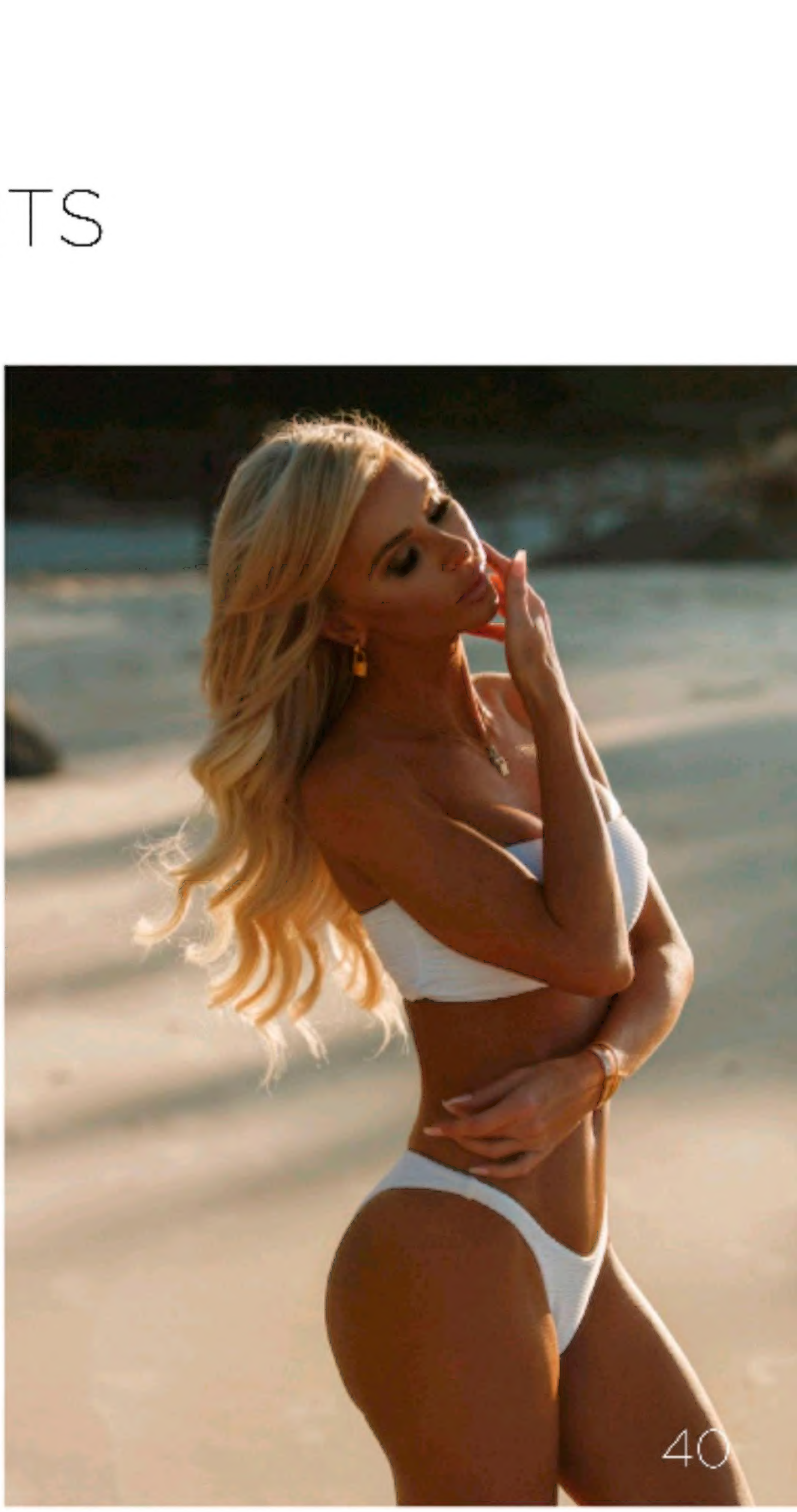

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BLACK VOTES MATTER

Killer Mike of Run the Jewels on the power of the minority vote—and the powers that want to stop it

BY KILLER MIKE PHOTOS BY STEVE HEAP

Young black men everywhere ask me, Why vote? Considering that black male unemployment is nearly double the national average, that black males are unfairly targeted in a bullshit drug war and that politicians rarely keep their word to the black community, it's a fair question.

My response to them is: I don't care if you vote; I care that you register. If you're not registered, you're less likely to be chosen to serve on a jury. And if you're not on a jury, how can I be judged by a jury of my peers? This always makes the men I speak with listen. Our rights in this country—free speech, gun ownership, protection from self-incrimination, trial by jury and many more—are weapons against tyranny from our own republic. Once you realize that a vote is a weapon, the ballot suddenly matters as much as freedom of speech and the right to own a gun. And a vote is a powerful weapon.

I vote because my vote, like my knife and my gun (which I carry daily), is a tool for fighting against tyrants and for the betterment of my community. I know it's effective because after the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013, restrictive voter laws popped up across the South. Southern white conservative men push for such laws—from requiring IDs to discourage minorities from voting, to redistricting attempts in places like Texas in order to cripple the minority vote—to help them regain or retain power. If the minority vote didn't matter, those white men wouldn't work so hard to stop it.

For the black community, it's important to point out that voting alone doesn't help. "Just" voting is like taking blood-pressure medicine and still eating fried chicken. To see an improvement, you also have to change your diet. Just as we have to eat more greens, we also have to focus on getting some green. Why? Because money is the biggest vote changer. We must remain loyal not to parties but rather to the people who will help us. I agree with black author Claud Anderson, who said in a speech, "We must pull out of both parties and vote as an indie bloc that only votes for people that will deliver what we expect to our community." What we expect are fair goods and services and a say in politics. To make this happen we must patronize our own businesses and use our athletes and entertainers as the investor class. Put simply, if you're going to order hot wings, buy them from Rick Ross and his Wingstop restaurant so he can put that money behind local politicians and state representatives who push policies that benefit us.

The most important elections in your life are local. Your city council, mayor, school board, county officials and police policies are all voted on locally. In my city, Atlanta, nearly half of all airport-vendor contracts go to black-owned businesses. This is a direct result of actions taken by Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first black mayor, who declared that 25 percent of all city contracts must have minority ownership or involvement. This policy came into existence because decades ago Jackson's grandfather John Wesley Dobbs empowered black voters and then used those votes to influence Atlanta elections. Because of that, I have never known a non-black mayor in Atlanta, a city with the third-highest number of Fortune 500 companies and a true black middle class. Even with gentrification, black-owned businesses and job hires are up in this chocolate city.

Once you realize that a vote is a weapon, the ballot suddenly matters as much as freedom of speech and the right to own a gun.

After my community masters the money and after black men get into the voting game, we can affect the courtroom culture that preys on us. No city, town or county with a large black population should be without equal representation on the police force, in the district attorney's office or on the judge's bench. Marching won't change that. Money and votes change that.

Relationships also help fuel change. I don't care who delivers what the Constitution promises. Frederick Douglass was a Republican; Maynard Jackson was a Democrat. Both are heroes in my household, as are Barack Obama and Ben Carson. (I don't normally like overly religious politicians, but I do like Ben.) It matters to me that when I approached Senator Bernie Sanders and suggested that I interview him on my barbershop tour, he accepted (as did Republican National Committee press secretary Raffi Williams). When I asked Senator Rand Paul to sit with me, he flaked.

Sanders talked with me—and advanced much further in the election than Paul. That's not to say I'm a kingmaker, but the young people, especially black men, who saw me interview Sanders got a chance to meet an ally. And in matters of politics, my community needs more allies.

My vote is a weapon for my good and against tyranny, from getting a chance to sit on a jury to making sure Atlanta's public schools return to greatness. My vote is a tool I will use to positively affect my community. Others like me must realize the power of this weapon—or have it used against them by a political class bought and sold by corporations and the men who own them.

My name is Michael Render, and I vote. Try to stop me.

Bella Thorne Can't Be Tamed

The former Disney star doesn't care what you think of her, and that's a beautiful thing

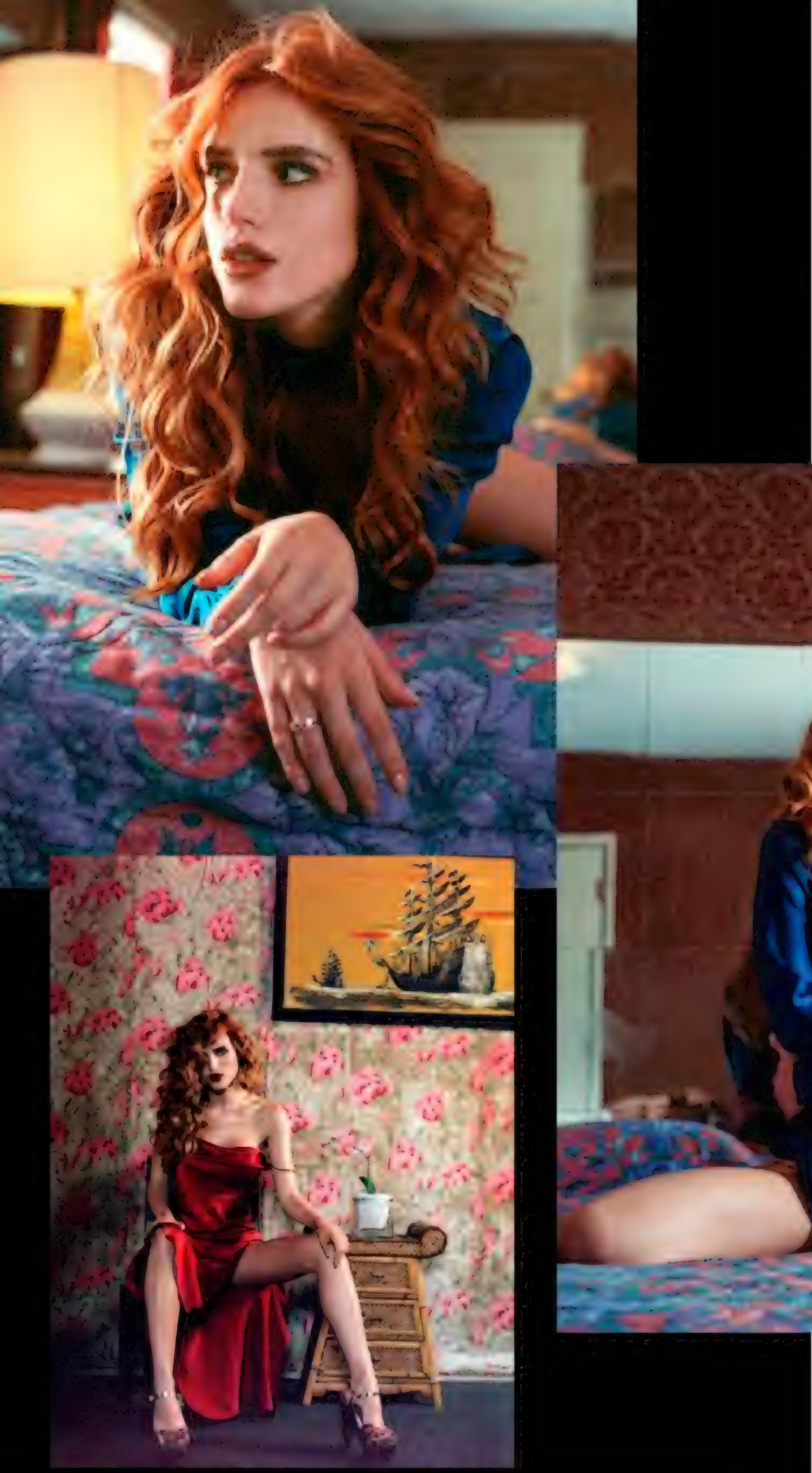
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHLOE AFTEL**

INTRODUCTION **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

"People often don't want to get to know the real you; they only want to get to know the person they think you are. For me, that means people are constantly trying to change me, every second of the day, especially on social media. I'm not fed up with social media. I understand it. But people like to comment on how my image is too edgy, that I'm too edgy, and on how they wish I looked. It's a lot of 'she thus, don't do that.' To them I say, fuck off.

There's this effort to try to shame a woman's sexuality by pulling a cover over it, but I'm a woman who loves skin. I love skin on me, I love skin on girls, I love skin on guys. If you're confident enough to show off your body, you should. Be confident. It can be difficult to get yourself to focus on you all the time, especially when you're trying to transition into who you really are, but I'm not going to change for anybody else. I love staying true to me."

"When I say no, it makes me feel good at night."



RACHEL ASHLEY JOHNSON

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MUA **Kendle Elise** | @shesinglassie
PR by **LA Media Group** | @lamediagroup

Rachel Ashley Johnson is an Internationally Published Model who has been extensively published. Rachel Ashley Johnson has been published in over 75 magazine features, 30 magazine covers, and published in Playboy 11 times. Rachel Ashley Johnson was Playmate of the month Playboy Australia August 2019.

Happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? Thank you so much Playboy for this phenomenal feature! I've been extensively published in over 75 magazine features, 30 magazine covers, and I've been published in Playboy 11 times. I had my very first publication feature in Playboy South Africa September 2018 and since then I've been published continuously.

What are some of your best career highlights so far? Some of my Carrer highlights have been being Playboy Playmate of the month in Playboy Australia Australia 2019, Moll Magazine Cover-model of the year 2021, placing second in the Maxim Covergirl Competition twice, and filming in the International Bikini Model Search Reality Show Model Life.

Social media is a very powerful tool, given your massive following, what are some of the challenges you face when it comes to marketing your brand and maintaining a solid following? Some of the difficulties would be increasing followers it requires time to increase following and engagement and posting on a consistent basis.

Can you give us breakdown of a typical day in the life of a glamourous model on set? Well it all begins with hair and makeup. Typically I'll have my hair styled at dry bar and a makeup artist will come to my condo to do my makeup. Once I arrive to a shoot we go over my various looks and conduct a light check. Then the magic begins I pose away and create incredible images.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? One of the biggest misconceptions is that people assume that being a model is easy just to pose and look beautiful but there is much more to it. I maintain a certain physique through a vegan diet, intermittent fasting,yoga,and hiking. Furthermore, I always look Photoshoot ready with my hair done, tanning, nails, facial treatments, makeup, and wardrobe. I market myself and network. Every publication I've been published in I've achieved on my own independently. I don't have an agent. I represent myself.

Now we know there are some pretty perks that come with being a beautiful woman, what would say are your favourite ones? One of my favorite perks of being a beautiful woman is that I've been able to travel worldwide through modeling. I've had photoshoots throughout the US, Caribbean, Paris, Santorini, and London.

Given that you're a stunning woman who undoubtedly gets a lot of attention, what are some of the nicest things men have done to try and get your attention? Some of the nicest things would be vacations, first class travel, jewelry, fine wines, upscale dining, and gifts.

What makes you feel absolutely sexy? Being infront of the camera in stunning lingerie and creating gorgeous images makes me feel absolutely sexy.

3 things that you can't go a day without? First, would be coffee, then a workout, and lastly listening to music.

Anything exciting we should be on the look out for coming through this year from you? I am launching my own bikini swimwear line of adjustable string bikini swimwear called the Bikini Dream. Additionally I am starting to do residential real estate and mansion tours in Beverly Hills.

Where can our readers find out more about you and stay updated with your current events and adventures? Follow me on Instagram Rachelashleyjohnson!

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? Thank you Playboy and to the readers for supporting me and manifesting my dreams into reality.

Results From Playboy's 2020 Sex Survey

Sex and cannabis are—forgive the pun—old bedfellows. Anecdotally, enthusiasts of both activities know that one greatly enhances the effects of the other. Apart from the body high and general euphoria that consuming cannabis provides, THC is also a vasodilator, which means it expands blood vessels and increases blood flow. That, it turns out, is exactly the physical reaction needed to kick sex up a notch. Moreover, many CBD users have reported reduced levels of stress and anxiety, which could help people get in the mood more easily.

Playboy partnered with cannabis giant Eaze and found that sex and cannabis have become a popular and pleasure-inducing pairing during the pandemic

When combined with a global pandemic, though, how do sex and weed stack up against anxiety, uncertainty and general societal despair? Playboy partnered with Eaze* to find out by asking hundreds of people: What has your cannabis consumption looked like during Covid? How is your sex life? Is one helping the other, or has the pandemic killed any and all good vibes?

BY **JACKIE BRYANT** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **NAOMI OTSU**

Cannabis and Alcohol Consumption

According to the survey of 827 people, which ran from July 13 to 27 and accounted for variances in gender, age and sexual orientation, daily cannabis consumption increased and daily alcohol consumption decreased while people sheltered in place.

When comparing pre-Covid with today, respondents who used cannabis less than once a month saw an uptick in consumption of 7.1%, while weekly use decreased by 18.4%. The survey also found an increase in heavy cannabis use. The 3.2% rise in daily use tracks with anecdata: If a well-stocked cannabis lover finds themselves confined to their home for a long period of time, it makes sense they'd start lighting up more frequently.

Interestingly, the number of respondents who drink alcohol daily decreased by 15.9% from pre-Covid to today, while once-a-week drinking increased by 24%. People who reported drinking two or three times a week decreased by 17.8%. And some respondents joined the teetotaler category: The percentage of people who reported "I don't drink" increased by 9.5%. This mirrors larger cultural trends, as people become curious about becoming "Cali sober," a

cute name for chucking the bottle in favor of sparking a joint.

Cannabis Types and Trends

Across the board, respondents' vape, edible, preroll/joint and topical consumption increased while their cannabis flower consumption decreased. More than 10% of respondents said they were easing off flower use, possibly because Covid was widely assumed to be a respiratory-focused illness in its early days. Edibles saw the greatest rise in use, with 13.8% of respondents reporting an increase in their consumption. Comparing pre-Covid to present day, there was a 27.6% increase in edible use before sex, while preroll/joints and flower consumption decreased by 26% and 10.6% respectively.

Cannabis and Sex

The vast majority of respondents—75%—reported pairing sex with cannabis during the first several months of lockdown; 32.9% reported using cannabis before sex "very often," while 29% said they use it "sometimes." Orgasms increased too: 5.6% of respondents said they were climaxing more during Covid after toking up. Sexual satisfaction has also improved during quarantine: 22% reported they're "extremely satisfied" with getting themselves off (up from 18.7% pre-Covid) and 35% were "extremely satisfied" with partnered sex (up from 33.2%). Since sex, orgasming and pot are good stress relievers, it makes sense that these numbers are trending upward.

The news isn't good for everyone, however. Overall, sex is trending downward. There was a 20.8% decrease in sex five or six times a month, and a 27.3% decrease in sex seven or eight times a month. The number of people who reported having no sex increased by 110%, which is easy to understand since many people have been quarantined away from anyone who could be considered a sex partner.

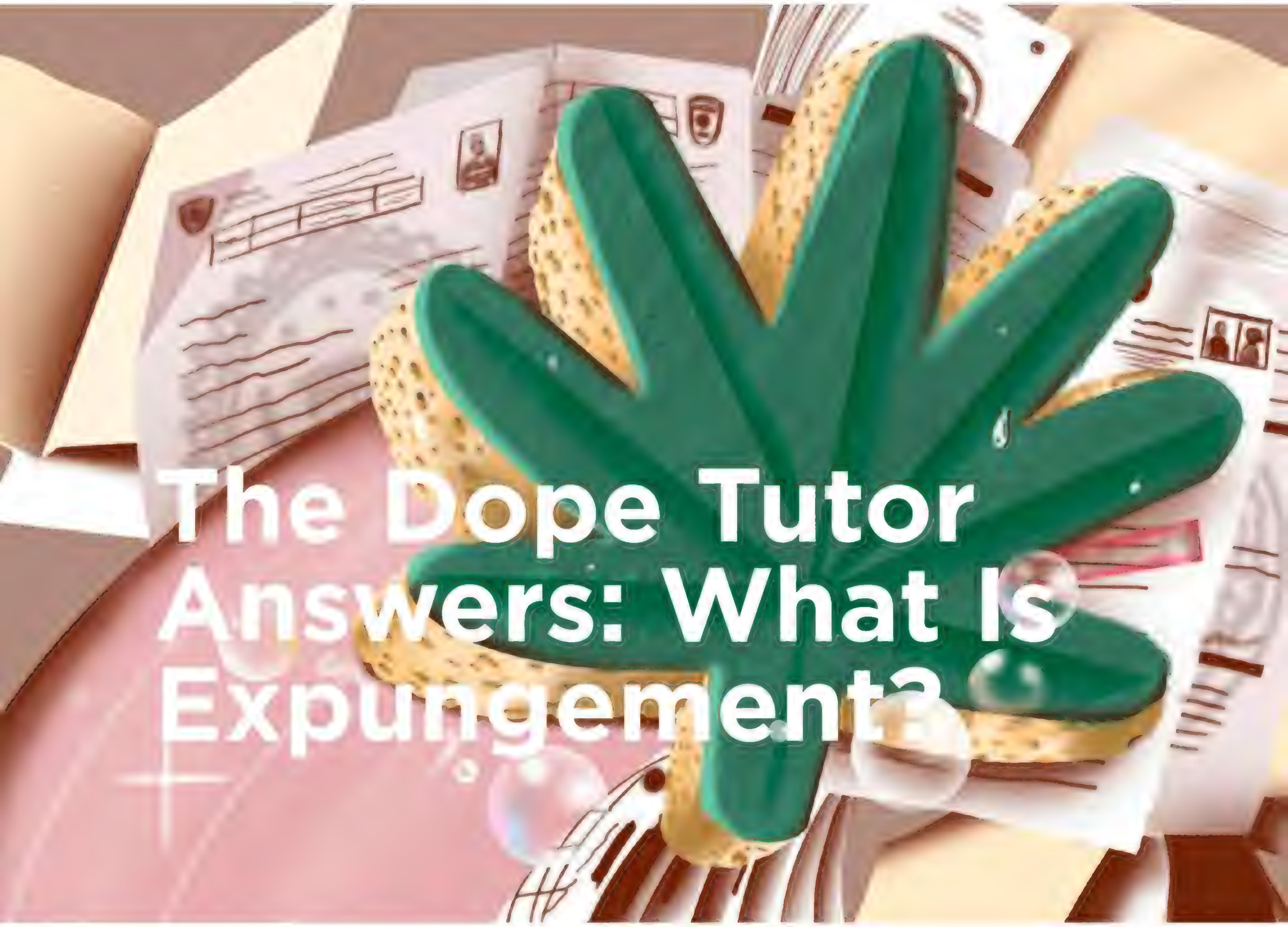
When it comes to solo pleasure sessions, the survey showed a 16.9% decrease in those who masturbated one to four times a

month and an 8% decrease in the time spent pleasuring oneself. Additionally, 11.3% fewer people are using prerolls/joints while masturbating, while flower consumption for the same activity is down 6.3%. Conversely, people are opting to get off alone, without a partner or cannabis—there was an 18.4% increase in people who don't consume cannabis before getting down with themselves.

Cannabis Doses

Across the board, respondents reported upping the THC and CBD dosages they took before having sex. Pre-Covid, 22.4% of respondents said 2 to 5 mg was their preferred dose; during Covid, the dominant dosage increased to 41 to 100 mg, the preferred range of 19.1% of respondents. This makes sense, especially if the frequency of use is increasing. Tolerance will also increase, and so will people's desire to push boundaries.

With people locked down away from the world, it's inevitable and understandable that certain homebound activities, such as having sex and consuming cannabis, would become more popular. More than just a way to cope, though, it seems people are taking the time to reconnect with themselves and their partners in more ways than one, using the time-honored traditions of having sex and using cannabis to get back to basics.



The Dope Tutor Answers: What Is Expungement?

Despite shifts toward cannabis legalization, many Americans live with the burden of weed-related criminal records

BY
ANDREW DEANGELO

ILLUSTRATION BY
RICHARD A. CHANCE

Many thousands of people are serving time in American jails and prisons for cannabis offenses that today would not be considered crimes. And those who have already served their time must deal with the further injustice of having a permanent criminal record attached to their names for weed-related infractions. One way to alleviate this burden is through expungement—erasing these convictions from a person's record. Although expungement as a concept covers more than just cannabis offenses, wiping the slate clean for those Americans whose offenses are no longer even considered crimes seems like common sense, right?

As we have experienced in the past several months, common sense does not seem to apply to the way in which we administer justice in this country. The U.S. criminal justice system is broken, especially for people who happen to be black or brown. When most people enter "the system," they're in a world beyond their control, thrown into an often torturous environment and cut off from work, money and family. They may not have resources

to make bail before their trial starts or after it, during an appeal. Generally, it's easier to get into jail than it is to get out.

If a person does make bail and is released, they might then fail a drug test (likely for weed), which puts them right back in the system. Or maybe they managed to stop smoking weed, but got into a car with a friend who, unbeknownst to them, was holding weed—bam, back to jail. There are literally hundreds of ways a person could be sent back to jail while out on bail.

To even make bail in the first place—especially for cannabis and nonviolent drug offenses—can be challenging, even for those who have property to use as collateral for the bond. I've seen bail set at $250,000 for possession with intent to distribute relatively small amounts of weed, only to see someone accused of rape have bail set at $25,000. It sounds crazy, but it's true. And this happens in the name of justice.

Once a person is convicted of a crime, the only way to reverse the judgment is on appeal. Most appeals fail. Once all appeals have been exhausted, the only way to get out of prison is through an act of clemency from a governor or the president, which is extremely rare. Out of nearly 2.3 million citizens serving time, only a few thousand will be granted any kind of clemency in any given year. Politicians are reluctant to grant clemency or pardons because it is perceived as politically risky. Keeping people locked up for cannabis is seen as less risky than granting them clemency—how tragic is that?

People who were busted in the U.S. for weed before it was legalized are in an unjust no-man's land. Their offense is no longer considered a crime, but they are still serving time—sometimes decades behind bars—for weed. Prior convictions, mandatory sentencing and multiple-offender laws (not to mention systemic racism) can add many years to these sentences—even bringing the sentence to life in prison.

Those offenders who do their time and get out still must contend with a permanent record that attaches to them like a ball and chain. Try to get an apartment? The formerly incarcerated could be denied due to their criminal record. Try to get a job? Denied. Try to get a student loan? Denied. What can happen when someone is denied the ability to survive? They might resort to crime and end up in jail again with an even longer sentence, and the cycle repeats.

The good news is there's help on the way for citizens languishing in prison for cannabis offenses and those who are out and dealing with cannabis records. The Last Prisoner Project (which I co-founded), Cage-Free Cannabis and other nonprofits are raising money, hiring attorneys, petitioning governors and even trying to get the Trump administration to release cannabis prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic.

These efforts have yielded modest results, and several prisoners have been freed. Building on this momentum is critical for future success. There will be no justice for the cannabis community until all our prisoners have been freed, records have been expunged and support has been given for reintegration into society. It's the least that can be done for citizens who should never have been locked up in the first place.

There will be no justice for the cannabis community until all our prisoners have been freed, records have been expunged and support has been given for reintegration into society.

Eaze's New Startup Accelerator Is Diversifying Cannabis

By **ALLIE VOLPE**

PHOTO BY **EAZE**

Leadership in the cannabis industry doesn't reflect the community it serves. Eaze's innovative program is paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive future

When Jennifer Lujan was hired as the director of social impact at Eaze, an online cannabis marketplace and delivery service, she immediately began brainstorming ways the company could make the industry a more equitable place. Throughout Lujan's six years working in cannabis, nearly three of which have been at Eaze, she's seen the industry take many shapes, from the grassroots days to the 2016 passage of California's Proposition 64, which legalized weed use for people over 21 and sparked an influx of cash and opportunities in the budding industry—notably via venture capital funding of businesses founded by white men.

Lujan saw firsthand how the war on drugs negatively impacted cannabis business owners and consumers of color, and she realized federal regulations made it difficult for underrepresented entrepreneurs—BIPOC (Black, indigenous and people of color), LGBTQ individuals and veterans—to get a foothold in the cannabis business. "We realized we should be doing more in this space," Lujan says. "We need to diversify the industry."

Leadership in the legal cannabis industry isn't wholly reflective of the community it serves. In 2019, just 37 percent of leadership positions in the industry were held by women, according to a Marijuana Business Daily's Women and Minorities in the Cannabis Industry report. According to a survey by Marijuana Business Daily, only 17 percent of cannabis executives were minorities in 2017. Regardless of industry, minority-owned companies are less likely to receive loans than nonminority-owned companies, according to a 2010 report from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency. In an industry that requires exorbitant funding to finance licenses or secure retail space, access to capital is crucial.

As the largest legal cannabis marketplace in California, Eaze has access to a pool of dispensaries, distributors, legal experts, marketers, engineers and, importantly, cash and investors. What if Eaze opened this network to entrepreneurs, Lujan wondered, and, specifically, to entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities?

"I had to fight four felonies for just trying to build an honest cannabis company."

Thus, the Momentum accelerator program was born. Launched last October, the initiative provides 10 diverse cannabis startups with a 10-week crash course in building a successful cannabis business. In November, after reviewing over 130 applications, Eaze announced the first cohort of 10 startups, each headed by a BIPOC founder with a mission to foster diversity and cultivate community within the cannabis industry.

Eaze facilitated video calls between the founders and various mentors early this year, and awarded $50,000 grants to each company to support their businesses. The accelerator program culminated with a virtual pitch event, allowing each founder to introduce their business to investors, dispensaries and distributors.

Although progressive, the concept of a social equity program is hardly novel. States such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Illinois have implemented cannabis equity programs, aimed at elevating the voices of marginalized

Jennifer Lujan, Eaze's Director of Social Impact.

communities most frequently targeted by restrictive drug laws. Black people are far more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white people and, ironically, such possession charges can prevent those with a record from working in the cannabis industry. Some of these programs expunge the records of those convicted of marijuana offenses. Eaze, however, is one of the few companies using its own resources for social equity programming.

While avoiding the bureaucratic tangle of government equity programs, entrepreneurs in Eaze's accelerator program are able take their $50,000 grant and hit the ground running, says Nancy Do, founder of Endo Industries, one of the companies in the inaugural Momentum class. Do says she's been waiting for grant funding from San Francisco's social equity program for over two years, a delay many other entrepreneurs have experienced citywide. Eaze's grant was a quick, tangible resource that didn't take equity away from the startups themselves.

"It's the first step in getting to a place where we can actually compete with companies with a lot more resources," Do says. "We're already showing that we're taking a small amount of resources and multiplying them by 100 because we're really hungry."

Endo Industries began in 2009 as a medical operation, but now offers healthy starter plants and seeds to growers, and is working to build out a cannabis supply chain—all with a mind for social and racial equity. As a cannabis operator in California for over a decade, Do has been personally affected by federal prohibition; Endo Industries was raided in 2016 and she was arrested. "I had to fight four felonies for just trying to build an honest cannabis company," she says.

Nancy Do, founder of Endo Industries.

That Eaze wasn't ignorant to the histories of many entrepreneurs of color and specifically lifted up startups with marginalized founders was a selling point for Do. "It is kind of dark to unravel the history of cannabis and what has happened to communities of color and how we have been affected," she says. "However, I truly think we can have such a beautiful outcome from this, at this time in history."

Community Gardens's business plan centers on the history of cannabis culture too—albeit a lighter chapter. Another of Momentum's inaugural cohort, the Oakland-based company draws on prohibition-era practices in its delivery service. Through the Momentum program, co-founder Raeven Duckett was able to develop the company's text-based ordering software, Mae, which allows customers to order weed deliveries via text—without downloading an app or creating an account—as a way of tapping into the unlicensed market consumer base. Named after a Black woman, Johnnie Mae Mezzrow, the wife of Mezz Mezzrow, a marijuana supplier in Harlem during the 1930s, the service aims to replicate the experience of texting a weed supplier.

"People are used to having a person they go to," Duckett says. "It's not necessarily a delivery company. It's like, 'Yo, I usually get my weed from Mae.'"

Duckett's Momentum investor mentor introduced her to a software developer who helped build Mae, evidence of the program's ability to provide resources for entrepreneurs who don't have access to a robust network. "As a minority founder and as a woman founder," Duckett says, "finding a software engineer we could work with—who would work with us at affordable rates—was something we just couldn't find anywhere else."

Despite the pitch event's move to a virtual platform, Momentum startups were able to connect with potential investors. But for one company, Los Angeles–based Ciencia Labs, the $50,000 initial grant from Eaze may be enough to carry the business. Co-founded by cannabis scientist Carolina Vazquez Mitchell, Ciencia Labs didn't have a product on the market before applying to the accelerator program. Now available as a vape, tincture and beverage (and, soon, gummies), Ciencia Labs's Dreamt is a sleep aid whose scientific formula Vazquez Mitchell toiled over until she found the right combination of THC, CBD, melatonin, valerian root and sleep-inducing terpenes to keep users asleep all night. Eaze, as well as 100 other dispensaries across California, stock the product. Business is good, Vazquez Mitchell says. So

Raeven Duckett, co-founder of Community Gardens.

An illlustrated preview of Mae, Community Gardens's text-based ordering software, in action.

good, in fact, that beyond Eaze's grant, the company may not need to relinquish any of its equity to outside investors—a major milestone for a Latina immigrant, she says.

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Duckett's Momentum investor mentor introduced her to a software developer who helped build Mae, evidence of the program's ability to provide resources for entrepreneurs who don't have access to a robust network. "As a minority founder and as a woman founder," Duckett says, "finding a software engineer we could work with—who would work with us at affordable rates—was something we just couldn't find anywhere else."

Despite the pitch event's move to a virtual platform, Momentum startups were able to connect with potential investors. But for one company, Los Angeles–based Ciencia Labs, the $50,000 initial grant from Eaze may be enough to carry the business. Co-founded by cannabis scientist Carolina Vazquez Mitchell, Ciencia Labs didn't have a product on the market before applying to the accelerator program. Now available as a vape, tincture and beverage (and, soon, gummies), Ciencia Labs's Dreamt is a sleep aid whose scientific formula Vazquez Mitchell toiled over until she found the right combination of THC, CBD, melatonin, valerian root and sleep-inducing terpenes to keep users asleep all night. Eaze, as well as 100 other dispensaries across California, stock the product. Business is good, Vazquez Mitchell says. So good, in fact, that beyond Eaze's grant, the company may not need to relinquish any of its equity to outside investors—a major milestone for a Latina immigrant, she says.

Despite the positive strides, Momentum is only one accelerator promoting diversity among a plethora of new cannabis businesses that may not understand the industry's history or how communities were, and still are, affected by prohibition. But Eaze is leading by example. Other companies have reached out for tips on how to launch accelerator programs of their own or to lend support, Lujan says. Equity in cannabis is a movement, and larger players have a responsibility to invest in underrepresented communities, she argues. "The only way we're going to make progress as a whole," she says, "is if we're supporting one another."

Carolina Vazquez Mitchell, co-founder of Ciencia Labs.

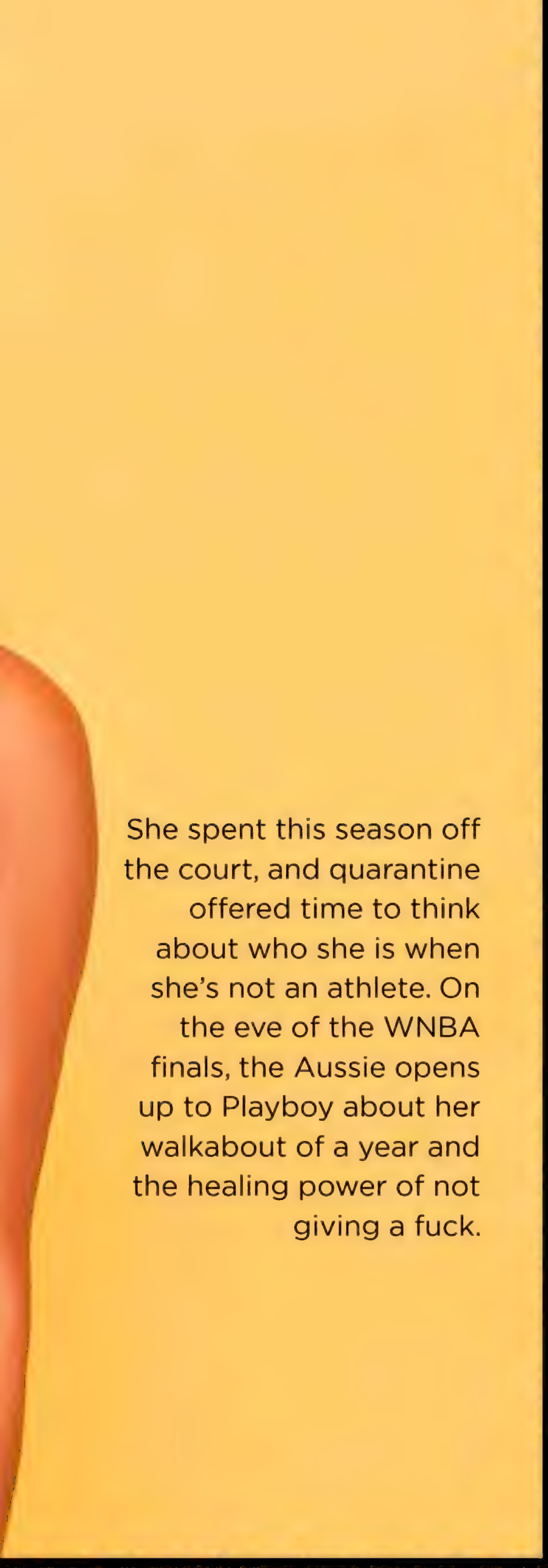
The Dreamt product offering, which Vazquez Mitchell crafted to aid with sleep.

20

Liz Cambage

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NICOL BIESEK**



She spent this season off the court, and quarantine offered time to think about who she is when she's not an athlete. On the eve of the WNBA finals, the Aussie opens up to Playboy about her walkabout of a year and the healing power of not giving a fuck.

Q1: *You celebrated your 29th birthday recently, so happy belated. With everything that has been happening in the world, this maybe isn't how you thought you would spend the last year of your 20s. What are you most proud of from this decade?*

Surviving. Still being here. The older I get the more testing and trialing I receive. So I'm just proud that I'm still here, pushing on, chasing goals, checking things off my bucket list and just living. Even in the hardest years, I have so many blessings coming my way, so I'm grateful for life every day.

Q2: *What do you hope to accomplish in the last year of your 20s?*

I was trying to chase an Olympic gold medal and a WNBA championship, but God's plan was a little bit different this year. So I'm just focusing on staying the strongest and healthiest I can because we all have no idea what next year will look like.

Q3: *Speaking of special dates, you did the ESPN the Magazine Body Issue—which features top athletes in the nude—a year ago. How has your relationship with nudity changed since that photo shoot?*

My relationship with nudity hasn't changed at all. It's interesting how people perceive nudity as a sexual thing, whereas I've grown up in a country [where nudity is normalized] and been raised in locker rooms. I'm very comfortable going to the lake or going to the beach and swimming naked with friends and it not being looked at as a sexual thing. But here in America I feel like the human body is just so over-sexualized.

The feedback I got when I did the Body Issue was very interesting. People saw it as a very sexual thing, but to me, my body is powerful. We bring life into this world with our bodies. Yet we cover them up, when we're such powerful beings. I'm so proud of my skin. I'm so proud of my six-foot-eight body and everything I can do with it. Nudity has never really been a sexual thing to me. It's always just been who I am and the skin I was in.

Q4: *You've talked a lot about being teased for your height and how you're much more confident now. What was the g"aha" moment for you? When did you truly fall in love with yourself?*

It was when I was 19. I got drafted to the WNBA when I was 19 years old. I had spent my whole life in Australia, and Australia is a very white-

"Me doing Play-boy is me celebrat-ing my sexuality like, 'Yeah, I am a straight six-foot-eight woman who likes to have sex."

washed country. I was actually having this conversation recently with one of my best friends, who I've known since I was 12 or 13. We talked about how people literally buy the bodies we grew up being made to hate.

Both being black girls raised in Australia, we wore colored eye contacts, we bleached our hair, we straightened our hair. We wouldn't tan. We would do everything to shrink ourselves and make us more white. It wasn't until I moved to America that I started to really embrace my body and my skin color and who I really am.

Q5: *You're currently in Los Angeles, and you just did your shoot with Playboy. Do you feel this project will be a coming out moment for you in terms of embracing your sexuality?*
I've never embraced my sexuality in public. Me doing Playboy is me celebrating my sexuality like, p"Yeah, I am a straight six-foot-eight woman who likes to have sex." I'm a human; it's what we do. As a female athlete, I feel like I'm not allowed to be sexy and I'm not allowed to be that person. All society wants from me is to sit down, shut up, go to training and play my sport.

Q7: *On your social media, people seem to react to you in a sexualized way. Do you feel being perceived as an internet sex symbol helps or hinders your message of body acceptance?*
People are attracted to me, and I know the social media game. You show a bit of skin and it gets people's eye. What some people might see as sexual, I just see as comfortable. I'm comfortable hanging out in a sports bra and short shorts. But some people will be like, p"She's flaunting her sexuality." No, I'm sitting here sweating, like chilling.

If that's what catches your eye and you start watching the WNBA because you thought I was cute, that's something I'm going to use. But I work my ass off every day. I'm not just here because I'm a pretty girl. At the end of the day, my looks are not going to save me. They're not real. I'm milking it while I'm young, because I'm not going to look like this forever.

Q8: *How do you define pleasure?*
Pleasure can come from a lot of things. It's not just sexual. Pleasure is finding the good in what you want; getting what you want is pleasure. Pleasure can come from finishing my workout and having my endorphins—the pleasure of being done. It can be the pleasure of eating your favorite food or

the pleasure of making love. At the end of the day, it's all those things that make you feel good.

Q9: *You received a medical exemption for this season with the Las Vegas Aces, and you've spent quarantine alone at your house in Melbourne. How was it being home after being constantly on the move for so long? Did you feel rejuvenated or stifled?*
It was the longest I had been stuck in Melbourne for years. I have never spent that much time in my own house. It was nice at the start, and then it got to a point where I'm like, p"Wow, there's just really nothing for me." If I'm not seeing my family, if I'm not training hard every day, I actually can't be there. But I did learn a lot about myself. I'm very independent. I love living alone. I need space from people. I don't really function well otherwise. I would have lost my mind in a house full of people during this time.

Q10: *You spent a lot of the offseason raising money for first responders after the brush fires in Australia. What personal effect did the fires have on you, and what has been the aftermath?*
I'm lucky that my family wasn't directly affected by the fires. But seeing the devastation—our country was literally on fire and covered in smoke and out of control for months. It went on until March. The start of Covid is when everything stopped burning.

I just can't believe this year has gone from my country on fire and people losing housing, losing entire cities—we lost firefighters, we lost wildlife—to being hit with this pandemic. It's been such a hard year for Australia.

Q11: *You were in a viral video recently leading a Black Lives Matter chant with activists in Melbourne. How has your activism changed?*
I've been going to protests. I've been out in these streets. I've been on TV. I've been in your newspapers. I've been talking about this for years in Australia, so I'm not new to this.

I was born a fighter. My mother raised a fighter and I am a product of my mother. Without my mom, without my grandmother, there is no me. They are my whole life. But I was raised white by my mom and my nana in a very whitewashed country. It was difficult for me to grow up. I've been bullied and teased ever since I can remember, and I've always been an easy target. So I'm resilient to it. Say what you want; it's not going to affect me.

Q12: *The WNBA has played a large role in pushing the greater sports community to be more vocal in the Black Lives Matter movement. Do you feel the work the WNBA has done has been overshadowed by the NBA?*
The NBA is always going to be on a much bigger platform than the WNBA, but what the women are doing—and what the men are doing—is amazing. We're all using our platform for good right now.

It comes from years and years of athletes being told to shut up and just play their sport and be grateful for what they have.

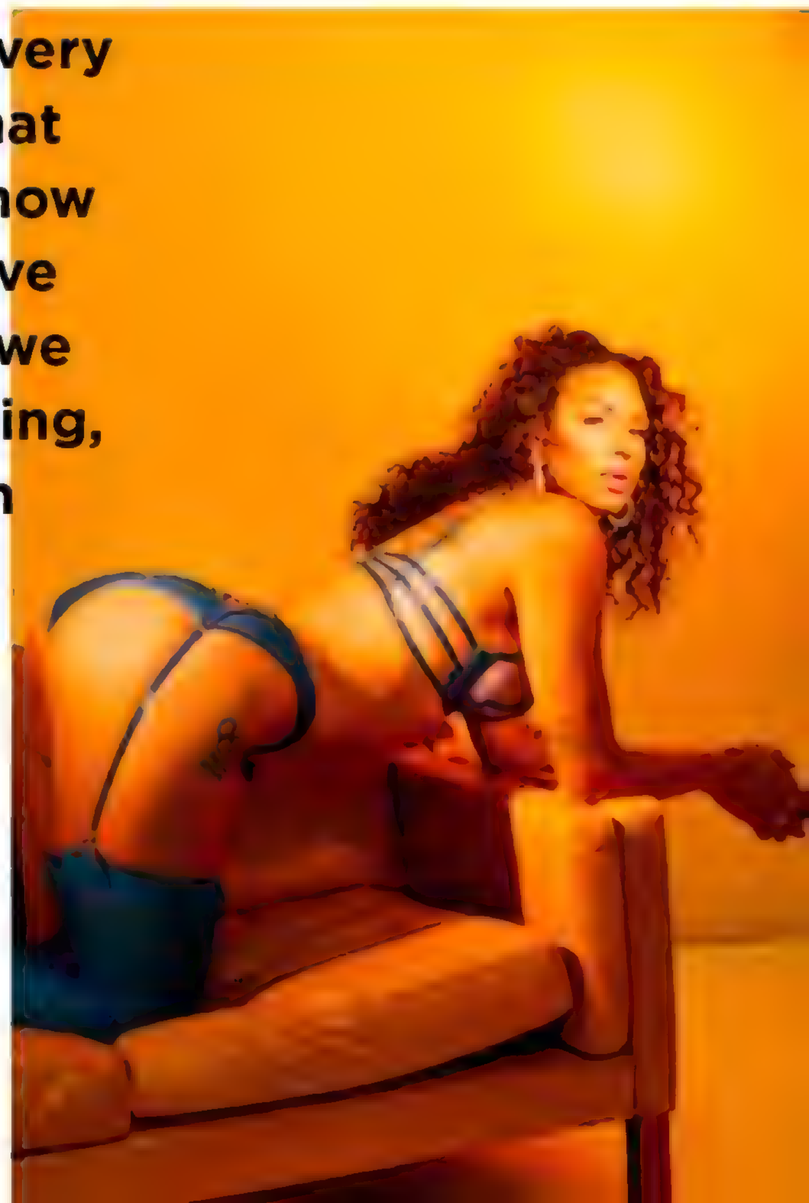
But what's the point of being happy with what you have when it's not good enough? We need to keep pushing for change. We need more diversity. We need to be making more money. You shouldn't stop and be happy with what you have. That's how people get lazy. To have a platform like we do and do nothing is a crime in itself. There are so many things in this world that need light shed on them, so I'm proud of every athlete using that platform right now for good.

Q13: *It sounds like you had a long journey to fully accepting your mixed heritage. What do you love most about your blackness now?*
I love that I never had to pay for a fake tan. I love that I've been kissed by the gods to have this beautiful skin. Meanwhile people spend thousands of dollars on tans and injections and things like that. I'm happy that I'm blessed to be born the way I am.

Q14: *You believe you experienced Covid while playing in China last year. Much of the narrative in the United States is that the virus only impacts the elderly or the immunocompromised. What would you say to people spouting those beliefs?*
Whatever I was sick with in December in China, it literally nearly killed me. I was on the phone to my mom screaming, p"You're going to have to come get me in a body bag for Christmas. That's going to be your Christmas." I was in a wheelchair. I couldn't walk for three days. I had never been so weak and in so much pain. It took until the end of January for me to get the phlegm out of my lungs—over a month. Whatever I had, the thought of my grandma having it—it would be game over. That's why I've been so good during this and stayed away from my family. I just stay training with close friends, trying to stay fit, trying to stay an elite athlete the safest way I can.

Q15: *If you weren't an elite athlete or you decided to quit the game tomorrow, what career would you be doing?*
I guess I'm lucky. I already deejay, and I own a vitamin company and a gym. When I go back to Australia, I'll be getting my personal training certificate. Something with health and fitness is my immediate future, but I'm also creative when it comes to music and design. I have too many choices for what I want to do after basketball. I don't have to stress about it right now. I'm in a very good position.
Q16: *How do you stay grounded? What keeps you humble?*
I have a lot of great people around me, and I was raised very well. I see every life exactly the same. It doesn't matter if you work at Walmart or you're banking my check. It doesn't matter if you're my teammate. It doesn't matter if you're on the other team. At the end of the day, we are all blood and bone. We are all the same, and everyone needs the same love and respect.

"I'm proud of every athlete using that platform right now for good. To have a platform like we do and do nothing, that's a crime in itself."

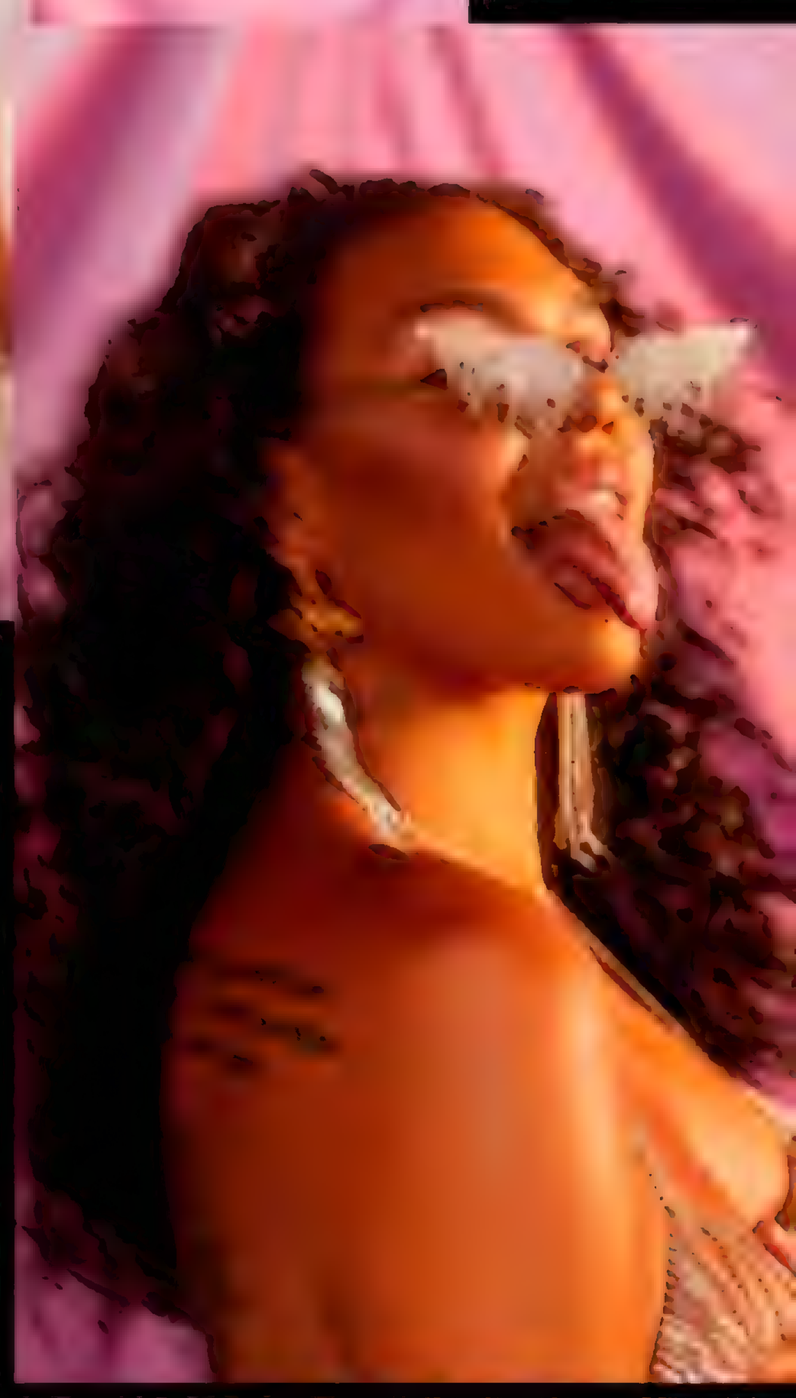


Q17: *Is dating a big part of this chapter of your life or is your focus elsewhere?*
I'm sick of all the in-betweens. I've spent my 20s working out what I'd like, and I know what I want in a relationship. When I'm ready it will come my way. Right now I'm focused on me. I'm focused on being the best I can be. Having someone else in my life to worry about when I'm heading into what could be the biggest year of my life with the Olympics and WNBA next year and playing back in Australia, I honestly don't have time for it. I'm willing and I'm open and I'm ready for it. But it will happen when it happens.

Q18: *What's your happy place? If you could blink and go to any place in the world right now, where would you go?*
Bali. Me on the beach, coconut oil, nasi goreng, the sound of the waves, a good book, a couple of friends. That it's for me. It's just being in the sunshine and being surrounded by good energy. That's all I need to be happy. That's real love. When this is over, that is my first stop.

Q19: *How do you take care of yourself when you need to re-charge?*
My self-care mantra comes from the inside out. If I'm working out, I know that's going to have my body looking good and in charge. If I'm eating like shit and not doing much, that affects me mentally. As long as I'm doing the right things and treating my body like the temple it is—treating it with love and care—I'm glowing and looking good on the outside.

Q20: *How are you most misunderstood?*
People see me on the court and on social media as big and loud and aggressive, but I'm really shy when you first meet me. I'm not going to give you all my energy straight up. A lot of my life, on the court day to day, I have to be such an alpha female. So when I'm at home or in a relationship, I'm pretty submissive. People get confused by that or think I'm standoffish or a bitch, and I'm like, p"No, I'm just getting to know you before I give you all of me." Because I'm a lot.



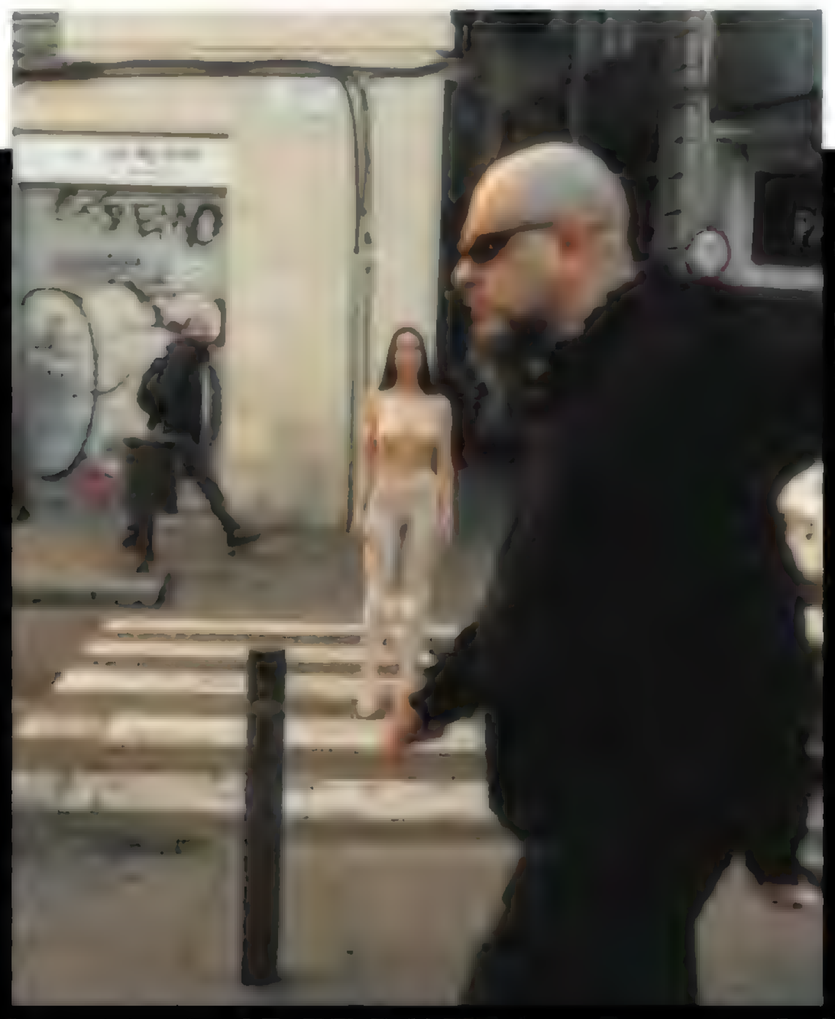
CULTURE SHOCK

A defiant and powerful public celebration of nudity, sexuality and the female body

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARLOTA GUERRERO**

When PLAYBOY approached Carlota Guerrero about an original pictorial, the Spanish art director, who had gained international notoriety after shooting the indelible cover of Solange Knowles's 2016 album, A Seat at the Table, knew almost immediately what she wanted to accomplish: m"I want to create an aesthetic inspired by the women who are empowered by their sexuality; I want to express that we are all goddesses and sexual beings at the same time."

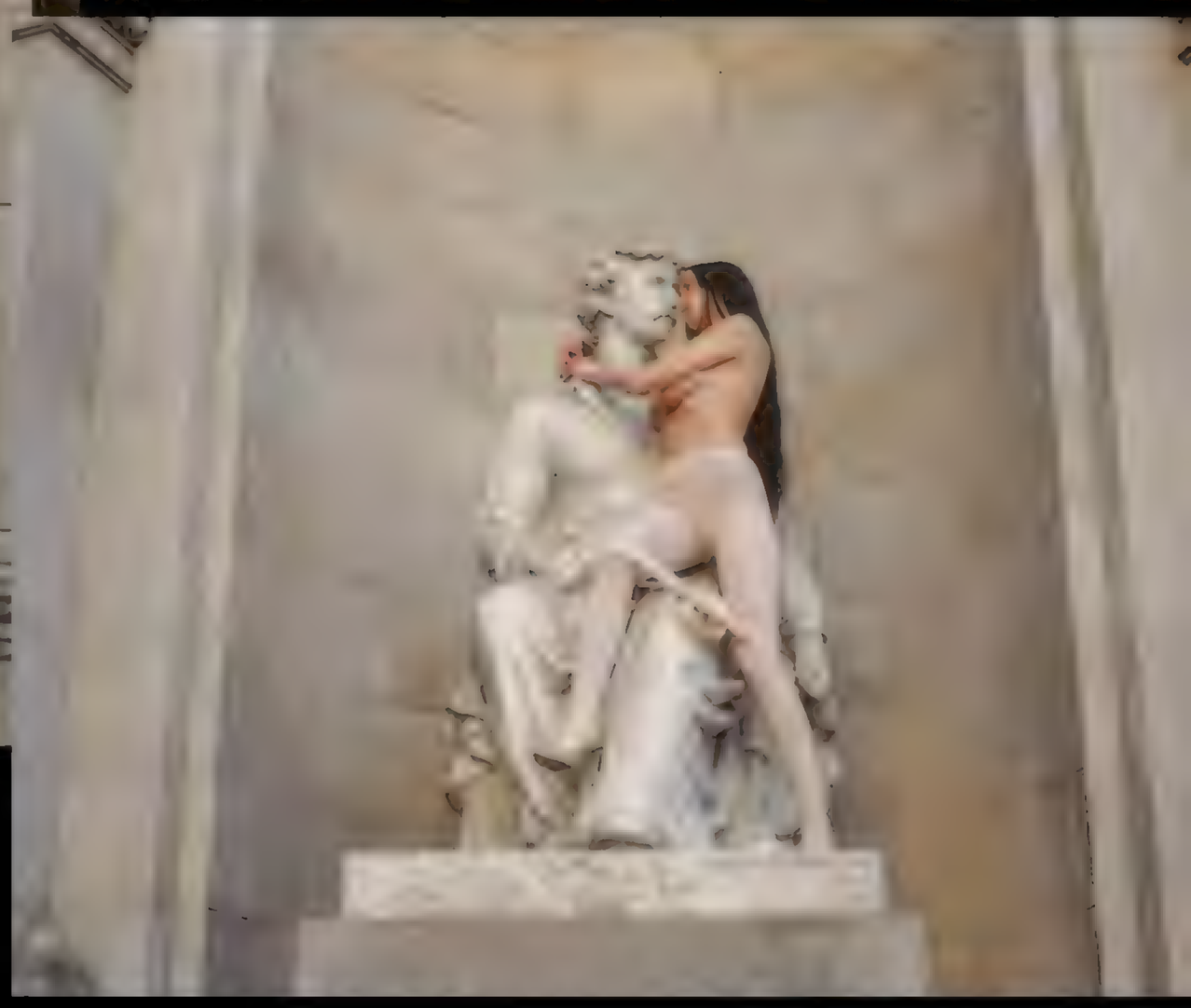
Featuring more than a dozen women in various states of undress marching through Barcelona (and challenging the law; the city banned toplessness in 2011), the following work shows how sexuality—and sexual freedom—can be both performance art and public spectacle.



"I want to express that we are all goddesses and sexual beings at the same time."

Featuring models Alex de la Croix, Dolores de la Rosal, Lovisa Lager, Virgin Maria, La Zowi, extras Bernarda Antonia, Ana Nicole Montes de Oca Colliander, Aminata Diao, Intissar El Meskine, Cristina Ramírez Garrido, Clàudia Grosche, Olivia Huerta, Celina Bähr Martins, Nina Pham, Maya Ponzini, Eleni Reynera, Elisa Sanfeliu Ricart, Gabriela Richardson, Patricia Franquesa Ruiz, Dana Silva, Carolina Costa Trinches.

Styling by Stephania Yepes, makeup by Gloria Rico, produced by O Creative Studio.



THE QUEEN of SULTRY

With

IMOGEN LOVELL

Instagram **@imogen.lovell**

Photography by **Rocky Batchelor**

This July is going to be a special one as we reacquaint ourselves with one of the sexiest women on the planet, Imogen Lovell. With her passionate stare that can woo any man, long, blonde, almost golden hair, and a body built like a goddess, it's easy to see why people just can't seem to get enough of her. Don't be fooled

by her sweet and innocent allure though, Imogen is no stranger to the modeling scene and has appeared across a large list of some of the most famous magazine covers in the world solidifying her career as a recognized international model. Now, Imogen is here, once again proving why she's the queen of sultry!

Greetings Imogen, it's awesome to be speaking with you, for the readers that may not already know, could you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're originally from, where you're living now, and what got you started on your modeling path? Hey hey, thank you for once again letting me grace the iconic Playboy magazine I'm very blessed, to say the least! Ok so a little bit about me... where do I even begin without spilling too much or getting myself into a bit of trouble hehe. So I'll begin and end with if you're watching you already know and if you're not watching then get watching because you're missing out and that's a fact, long story short I'm just the girl next door kind of vibe born on the Gold Coast, Australia and currently back living here after living between here and Melbourne for the past ten years. Modeling is life and is what I do best. That's why I started.

So, it's no secret that you're a veteran in the modeling game, what would you say have been some of the highs and possible lows of your career so far? So many to tell but to name a few highs, definitely when Hugh Hefner would throw his amazing Halloween parties at the mansion. It was on a whole other level! parties are never going to be the same as they were back in those days! A low would be when I actually flew over to LA for Playboy Golf and went out clubbing the night before the whole event started and ended up in hospital as my drink had been spiked. I will always remember that trip as I ended up so sick and in quarantine when I landed for a few hours before I was allowed to be home safe and sound. Such a disaster!

You're such a natural beauty that you make modeling look easy but as with every career, there are always challenges. What advice would you give to the girls that you inspire and who are hoping to follow in your path? I would definitely preach to all the girlies out there to always be your own boss! You are the decision-maker when it comes to your body and mentality, you make the rules! This is your world and we're just living in it. Another important thing is networking, if you know the vibe you know the vibe.

On the topic of inspiring others, who would you say has been your role model in both your life and career? My role model in the modeling industry would have to be Marilyn Monroe, she was just a boss in all aspects of her life and career and is a constant reminder to me to do whatever the f*ck I want.

When you're not working your magic in front of the camera what are some of the things you absolutely love doing for fun? I love 'me time' sitting there in bed with Netflix and lollies as sugar is my all-time biggest weakness yum!

It's a bit of a personal question but what would you say is your favorite part of your body and why? My moody eyes, because they're changing colors hourly, daily, weekly they go from all types of light and dark blues to green with yellow specs through them I never know what I going to wake up with the next day!

Wow, you're Insta'famous, and all your pictures look so professional. Do you travel a lot and what are some of the best places you've got to visit during your career? I travel too much I would usually say but COVID has stopped that for us all at the minute. I use to die to just sit at home doing nothing but never had a second to do so, now that I get more than a second to I literally can't wait to leave. But the best places I've visited would have to be Cancun my all-time favorite, Miami, New York and can't not say the Greek islands but on a smaller scale, I also loved living in the Philippines. It was really cool place to experience with friends.

So, July is your birthday month, let us be the first to offer you our best wishes Imogen. Have you got anything special planned for the 7th to celebrate the occasion? I've left this all in the hands of my baby brother Cooper and my partner they both are up to no good all the surprises but it's pretty funny when my partner can't keep a secret and keeps letting loose of what he has got in store for the big event hehe but you will all have to wait and watch I'm sure it will be posted all over social media no doubt!

Here's a question most men are thinking, and that's is there a special someone in your life at the moment and if not, what qualities do you look for in a potential partner? Funny, I recently do have a man in my life and he's been ticking all my boxes! I love a man who's a boss. Who knows what needs to be done and gets the job done and just takes the lead as I am to all over the place and hate making decisions about anything and everything so he balances me out! But other green flags for me are men who are sure of themselves and not crazy coz I'm crazy enough!

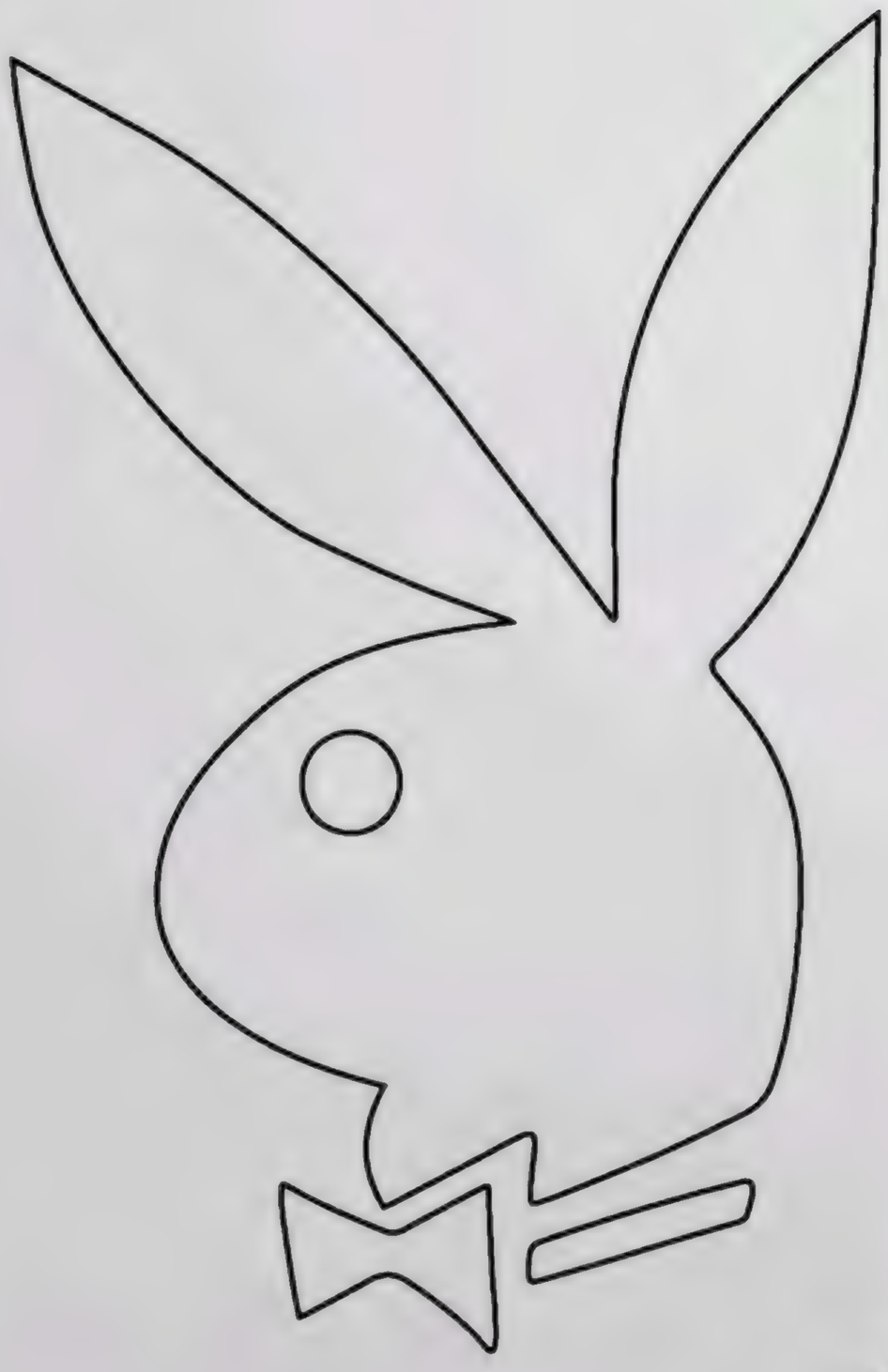
You've already achieved so much at such a young age, what personal qualities would you say got you to where you are today? I'd have to put

it down to my personality I feel like everyone who sees me on the interest (social media) judge me and instantly think I'm going to be completely opposite to who I truly am which is a down-to-earth happy go lucky bubble of energy.

Have you got any new and exciting projects at the moment and could you tell us more about that? I have very exciting projects in the works at the moment but you will all have to wait and see!

Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule to speak to us Imogen, do you have any last words for our readers and more importantly, where can they follow you online? Snapchat: @iimogenlovell / Twitter: @imogen_lovell or FB: @imogenlovelll. For exclusive content check the link in my Instagram bio... x

Want to see more of Imogen? Then follow her adventures on Instagram @imogen.lovell for all her latest content and story updates!



In

Defense of the Hand Job

WRITTEN BY
ASHLEY MANTA

PHOTO BY
MANUEL RUIZ / ADDICTIVE CREATIVE

A self-proclaimed "hand job evangelist" asks us to reimagine a tragically underrated sex act

Hand jobs are underrated for two main reasons: lack of enthusiasm and lousy PR. When I tell people I teach hand job classes, the most common response is, "Why?" People with penises scoff dismissively and assure me that no one could ever give them a better hand job than the one they give themselves. I respond confidently that although I cannot get you off faster than you do, I can definitely get you off better than you do.

Hand jobs are often relegated to a thing you did in junior high before you started having "real" sex, not a destination all their own. Although "a sad hand job" has become so ubiquitous that a Cards Against Humanity card was made for it (like I said, terrible PR), I am here to argue that hand jobs can be elevated to an art form when approached with passion and creativity.

I am a hand job evangelist. So much so that I cofounded International Hand Job Day with Timaree Schmit, and I even created a hand sex Masterclass to instruct others in the fine art of manual stimulation. I love hand jobs for many reasons, but the primary one is that they're so versatile. There are so many things you can do with your hands! The possibilities are limited only by your imagination, and you can use countless positions.

My favorite is my signature position: the reclining diamond, in which the receiver lies on their back and the giver sits between the receiver's legs, with the giver's legs underneath the receiver's legs. (If you're into tantra, it's basically yab-yum with the receiving partner reclined.) This allows the giver to use both hands—a crucial upgrade to the traditional single-handed hand job with the other arm being used to prop up their body. From your vantage point between the receiver's legs, you're able to watch their facial expression and the way their chest rises and falls, and get real-time feedback on how they're enjoying your techniques. It also makes it easier to access the balls and perineum, which are two hot spots largely ignored during more conventional hand jobs. My other favorite position, which also allows access to the balls and perineum, places the receiver on their hands and knees while the giver sits or stands to one side and uses both hands for stroking.

Hand jobs are also versatile in that they give couples flexibility if they don't feel like engaging in penetration but still want to explore pleasure together. They're especially valuable if you, like me, have jaw pain or a high gag reflex or don't like having ejaculate in your mouth.

There are a couple supplies that are useful to have on hand. (See what I did there?) I cannot overstate the importance of using lube. My favorite brand is Sliquid, and I have gone through many bottles of Sliquid Silver, their silicone lube. Silicone is silky and long-lasting, and I like my hand jobs to last quite a while! My record is 95 minutes, but I hope to one day cross the two-hour mark. Good luck giving a blow job for that long! Another helpful thing to have nearby is a hand towel for cleaning up lube or fluids after you're finished. Plus water, for both the giver and the receiver. Hydration matters!

A hand job really is just a genital and pelvic massage. In addition to giving pleasure, it can also be intensely relaxing for the receiver, especially if you incorporate the inner thighs, hips and pubic mound into your massage. We hold so much tension in our pelvic region, and this is a great way to unwind some of that stress. I like to begin by thoroughly lubing my hands and running them up their inner thighs, moving into a diamond shape with my thumbs behind the balls and my pointer fingers resting on the pubic mound. Then, with my dominant hand, I wrap my fingers around the shaft and squeeze to the top, thoroughly lubricating the entire area. Don't be afraid to use pressure; it feels fantastic! A common mistake I see people making is the stereotypical "limp wrist" gesture. That doesn't even look fun!

One of my big crowd-pleasing moves is one I've nicknamed the Pepper Grinder, in which you stack your hands on top of each other and twist in opposite directions on the shaft, just like—you guessed it—a pepper grinder! Don't worry if the receiver doesn't have enough real estate to use all of both hands, you can modify the technique by just using your pointer and middle finger and thumbs of both hands. Another move that works fantastically is called the Lemon Juicer. Grasping the shaft in one hand, you make a cup with your other hand and run it over the head in a circular motion. This can be super sensitive for some folks, so be sure to check in and get feedback! My hack for feedback: Rather than saying, "How do you like it?" try two different techniques and then ask the receiver which they liked better. You can also vary speed and pressure based on the receiver's preferences. Some people like a slow, deliberate pace, while others prefer a quicker pace. I find people usually prefer that the pace quickens as they approach climax.

I hope these tips and reframes have inspired you. Hand jobs can be such a delight, and there is so much more to them than what we see represented in porn and popular media. Challenge your assumptions, try something new and see what's possible! Oh, and if you use the coupon code "PlayboyAdvisor" I'll give you 50 percent off my Handy Skills Masterclass. That's how passionate I am about giving you the tools to tool your tool. You're welcome.

Hand jobs can be such a delight, and there is so much more to them than what we see represented in porn and popular media.

What Should Porn for Women Look Like?

This female-founded production company is trying to find out

BY DANA HAMILTON

PHOTO BY DAINIS GRAVERIS ON UNSPLASH

I grew up on the porn of the early 2000s. Late at night, my eight-inch TV (with built-in VCR!) picked up bleach-blonde hair, surgically enhanced boobs and landing strips so thin they could be mistaken for John Waters's mustache. I squinted to make out vaginas getting plundered by salami-sized dicks in "straight" porn and jammed by fingers decorated with uncomfortable-looking press-on nails in "lesbian" porn. If a clit was ever touched—which was rarely—it was with the same energy as a flamenco guitarist after a three-day coke binge or someone trying to erase a wrong answer on a Scantron with 30 seconds left on an important exam.

As I learned more about my body—particularly my clit—and started replicating things I learned in porn, I realized none of the stuff I was seeing could result in an actual orgasm for a person with my anatomy. At first, I thought I was broken—that there was something wrong with my body—but then I started talking to women and hearing similar frustrations: The methods to please us that our partners learned from porn simply didn't work. Many of us shared the pain of a partner believing they can stick it in an ass in one fluid motion with spit as lube, the confusion of not being able to orgasm from penetration alone, the exhaustion of girl-on-top becoming a Barry's Bootcamp–style squat workout with no climax and the guilt of thinking our bodies are at fault.

It would be fine if we could all recognize that we've been lied to and have a cultural understanding that porn isn't real, that it's a fantasy not to be tried at home. But we don't.

Instead, we have a world in which people believe mainstream porn is a real, usable instruction manual for how to please someone with a vulva and assume the orgasms depicted on screen are real.

As an adult, I couldn't look at porn the same way again, and I stopped watching it altogether. Every time I'd try to get off, the knowledge that the women were faking it made me feel bad. And don't get me started on the misinformation. When I became a sex writer and educator, all the myths I had been taught as fact via scrambled TV were things I was now correcting via DMs and weekly Q&A sessions on my Instagram.

The chasm between what real sex looks like and what sex looks like in porn continues to widen. I tell people that sex in porn is to real sex as the WWE is to wrestling in the Olympics. The mechanics are there, but one is purely entertainment and blown way out of proportion. For me, the choice is whether to exclude yourself from watching porn entirely or watch something that leaves a knot in your stomach.

Luckily, it seems the sex industry is waking up to the way people get turned on. Sex-positive bloggers and publications such as Salty exist on Instagram (when they're not combatting shadow bans). Sex toy companies like Unbound, Satisfyer, Womanizer and Fun Factory have followings akin to influencers. Activists, writers and sex-positive brands are calling bullshit on tropes that have been perpetuated since Debbie did Dallas. Porn from PinkLabel.tv, the CrashPad Series and Erika Lust is seeking to offset the misinformation and lack of pleasure in porn, and the cultural ramifications of both.

When I was invited to observe a shoot for Bellesa Films, I immediately said yes. Scrolling through Bellesa's Instagram posts and looking at their collaborations with Laurie Mintz, author of Becoming Cliterate and wearer of a clitoris necklace, I could see Bellesa putting in the work. The production company prides itself on having women call the shots every step of the way (Bellesa was founded by a woman and features scenes both written and directed by women), and I was interested to see firsthand what porn looks like when it's created by people with my parts.

I knew things would be different the moment I arrived on set at 8:30 on a Tuesday morning in the San Fernando Valley and my five-foot-six, brunette, Macy's catalogue, not-Victoria's-Secret-lookin' ass was mistaken as "talent" by the makeup artist (which my 15-year-old self would consider one of the biggest thrills in my life to date).

The male performer, Damon Dice, was stuck in rush hour traffic, so while we waited, I chatted with Bellesa founder and CEO Michelle Shnaidman, director Jacky St. James, PA Shawn Alff and the crew, as the female performer, Cassidy Klein, stretched and used a foam roller on the floor. We spoke about Cassidy's plans for her birthday—hiking and camping by herself—which turned into a group conversation about mortality and growing older. The vibe was so comfortable that only when I accidentally spilled coffee on the floor and it was immediately cleaned up with a baby wipe was I reminded exactly where I was.

When Damon arrived, production immediately got down to business. Bellesa takes creating a story so seriously that about half the filming time was spent nailing the exposition. Each Bellesa movie has an actual backstory before the sex happens. This wasn't the pizza delivery guy of yesteryear or even the stepbrother fucking his stepsister and stepmom of today. In this scene, Cassidy was going to her sister's ex-fiance's

This wasn't the pizza delivery guy of yesteryear or even the stepbrother fucking his stepsister and stepmom of today.

For the first time, we're seeing women as participants in sex instead of bystanders, and Bellesa nails this beautifully.

house to pick up the rest of her sister's stuff and return her engagement ring. This premise—like most Bellesa Films features—began as a fantasy suggestion from one of Bellesa's community members.

Just like a commercial movie set, Jacky stopped Damon and Cassidy often to talk about inflection, tone and character development. The connection they were creating on film carried over between takes as they playfully touched and hugged each other. (I later learned that Bellesa makes sure real-life chemistry exists by asking the female performer what type of sex she wants to have and with which male performer she wants to have it before the script is written.)

Next, Cassidy showed Jacky the clothes she brought as wardrobe options. I was expecting discussions about lingerie, but they went with an army green spaghetti-strap tank top, jeans, brown strappy sandals and a flesh-colored bra. A flesh-colored bra! You know, what normal people wear when they're not expecting to have sex. The scene hadn't even started, and I was already sold.

After the exposition had been filmed to her liking and a few clothed promo shots were photographed, Jacky prepared the set for the next part by announcing, "Hey, anybody wanna fuck?" We laughed.

After the performers showed each other their latest STI test results, Jacky asked them to semi-privately talk to each other about dos and don'ts. I caught Cassidy mentioning to Damon that she really enjoys having her neck licked and kissed. Everything else was between the two of them, out of earshot. When the scene started and the camera was rolling, one of the first things Damon did was lick the entire length of her neck in one stroke. The look on Cassidy's face made my heart flutter.

I realize the fantasy is having a partner who gives a shit about getting you off. Vulva-havers are looking for sex that looks the way it looks when there's a great partner involved who doesn't see our bodies as merely something to masturbate with. To see Cassidy not being treated as a conquest, I immediately thought of all the women now learning about their bodies and thinking, My pleasure counts too. I should have a say in how good this feels for me too. For the first time, we're seeing women as participants in sex instead of bystanders, and Bellesa nails this beautifully.

There's laughter as they fumble to take their clothes off and a continuation of the storyline throughout the sex, with Damon ad-libbing, "I'm so glad you stayed," after making out some more. He asks for consent before fingering her and again before going down on her, and he even eats pussy the right way, where the mechanics of it are so small they aren't visible. Pussy-eating in most porn looks like a 13-year-old's first kiss on a dance floor. When Damon spits on her, he does so stealthily instead of passionately hocking a loogie onto her cooch like it had just disrespected his father (one of my biggest porn pet peeves). He doesn't eat her out to orgasm, but at least it looks similar to what would eventually cause an orgasm. They even mutually masturbate a few times and I see Cassidy smiling as she self-stimulates.

When she rides him, she tilts her pelvis forward a little more than is typical in porn, and I can believe her clitoris was grinding on his pelvis. Her legs shake in a way that doesn't seem manufactured. Her moans crescendo, and she orgasms—but not the screaming, eye-rolling, tongue-out kind of porn "orgasm" that's about as subtle as a punch in the face.

"Did you really come?" Jacky asks Cassidy. "I don't believe you."

"I swear, I really did!" Cassidy says. And I believe her.

They take a quick break between sex positions. As the crew changes camera positions, Cassidy and Damon compare and explain their tattoos like old friends. "Don't feel the need to orgasm unless it's actually real," Jacky reminds Cassidy before cueing the camera again. "It's not supposed to be perfect; it's supposed to be real." I wondered how many times that phrase was uttered on the set of the porn I watched at 2 A.M. when I was 15 years old.

And, just as she says, it isn't perfect. There are some things Jacky says she has to get the talent to unlearn. I notice Damon grab Cassidy's wrist to place her hand on his dick and then push her head while she gives him oral—which lasts longer than the time spent on Cassidy—but I notice him catch himself and stop. When Damon lets "I want you to taste your pussy on my dick" slip while Cassidy is blowing him post-vaginal sex, Jacky is quick to sternly tell him she's going to cut that part out.

"You're gonna get notes; I'm gonna be hard on you," she tells him half-teasingly before leaning over to me to say, "It's kind of liberating because they have to unlearn everything."

I'm ready to unlearn everything from porn too.

I'm excited for people to become more personal with their porn. After all, you used to only hope to get a glimpse of a titty after asking to head to the back room of a Blockbuster. Now, your seatmate on Spirit Airlines is playing it on their phone, listening to moans through a pair of AirPods. To get to know a brand and develop a connection to their porn, as well as a concern that it's socially responsible? That's what should happen as porn studios become household brands. Beyond those Girls Gone Wild DVDs you ordered at 3 A.M. or the monthly subscription you had to Bang Bus in college, would you have been able to name any production companies five or 10 years ago? I couldn't.

But times are a-changin'.

Bellesa Films recently asked its community about using sex toys during partnered sex—something I've desperately wanted to be normalized in porn, and they're making it happen. Bellesa Films is building a brand by incorporating multiple facets of women's sexuality, which has been treated as a second thought for so long. We know a person with a penis comes in porn because there's physical evidence. Navigating the world and not knowing if your orgasm is guaranteed by nature makes you view porn a different way. Sex sells, and vulva-havers are buying too.

"Don't feel the need to orgasm unless it's actually real. It's not supposed to be perfect; it's supposed to be real."

Organization Spotlight: California Black Women's Health Project

Our healthcare system fails to protect black women. This organization is pushing for a future where black women can visit the doctor without fear

BY ANITA LITTLE

The moment you step into a doctor's office you entrust doctors, nurses and clinicians with your vulnerability. You're counting on them to provide you with fair treatment, dignified care and hopefully some healing. That moment can be daunting enough for anyone, but the burden can increase multifold if you're black and a woman. Being a black woman, I often feel myself bracing in the waiting room, revving up, knowing I'll have to fight to be listened to and acknowledged.

Health disparities are more than a frustration; they can be deadly. Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy than white women. And you can't outrun the systemic racism of our healthcare industry with doctorates or six-figure incomes. This alarming statistic persists across incomes and education levels.

"I don't really like to talk about implicit bias," Sonya Aadam, the CEO of the California Black Women's Health Project, explains over a Google Hangouts. "I talk about explicit bias, because if you are causing harm to another human being who's in your care, that is not implicit. It is explicit." The mission of CABWHP is advocating for policies and practices that protect the physical and mental well-being of black women and girls. Since 1994, it has fought against black women's health disparities through education, research and community organizing. In this era of increased attention to black lives, Playboy spoke with Aadam about what Americans need to do to ensure that black women aren't left behind.

How do we turn this moment we're in into a movement? I'm already seeing Black Lives Matter disappear from my social media feeds. Everyone was all about it for a hot minute, and then it was back to regularly scheduled programming for a lot of them.

We recognize that this could be a fad or a phase, and certainly hope it's not. The opportunity to turn it from a moment into a movement really does come from the systems and the structures that are impacting lives. It comes from the corporate sector. It comes from the public sector. It comes across the various social institutions. Sometimes we think it's just the on-the-ground activists who make it into a movement and continue it, but it doesn't become fully adapted into the fabric of our lives until our major sectors adapt it. That's where the real stickiness takes place.

"Medical professionals will say they treat everybody the same, but that's the problem. They're treating everybody the same, but everybody's experience is not the same."

You can have hashtags and people all over social media talking to each other, but when you're able to make change at an institutional level, that is how you change things from a moment to a real movement. Black Lives Matter is not new. Yet when you have a corporation that is posting, tagging, highlighting, creating commercials, that's when you reach someone who otherwise would not have thought to connect with it.

How would you describe the importance of CABWHP to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

California Black Women's Health Project was born out of wanting to elevate the voices of black women around health and wellness, around the time when the public health movement was uplifted in the late 1970s and 1980s. We wanted to ensure that the issues impacting our health—a lot of which encompass racism and the disparities we face in the healthcare system—were centered.

Black women are the root of our communities, as we are the administrative and health heads of our families. Our roles as mothers, sisters and daughters put us in a position to uplift the need for better health for our loved ones and better health for ourselves. We train black women to be health advocates, and we push for policies to improve our access to health.

Even with all the activism that's happening right now, I feel like black women—black trans women especially—are left out of the conversation. Breonna Taylor received attention only after George Floyd's murder went viral. Could you speak on the lack of intersectionality in mainstream activism, and how you've encountered that in your own work?

Black women's lives are the intersection of everything. We face issues around misogyny, racism, sexuality and gender identity. We face the structural and historic challenges that discount us, dismiss us and ignore our voices. We are forced to rally together and sometimes have to shout to be heard. We are a proud sisterhood. The disparities around the death rate and the abuse of women in our community is frightening. The loss of life for our trans sisters is never even reported in the news.

We have black women entering the healthcare system in their perinatal phase who then find themselves in frightening situations at a time when you are supposed to be celebrating something beautiful, magical and wonderful. If you're a lesbian and you come in with your partner, you enter into a system where you are treated differently and that relationship isn't respected. If you are trans and you're in the birthing situation, the hospital system acts as if they don't know what to do with you. You're treated as some anomaly, but you're a human being. You should be protected in

an environment like that.

Medical professionals will say they treat everybody the same, but that's the problem. They're treating everybody the same, but everybody's experience is not the same. Black women come into the healthcare system with our experiences that need to be acknowledged, and we need to be treated in such a way that recognizes that. We are experiencing historical harm; we're experiencing an inordinate level of stress because of racism. To not acknowledge that and to place the blame at our feet is one of the problems.

You face myriad challenges in your work, but is there something that is so rewarding or uplifting that it makes you continue forward in your purpose?

I do this work so proudly. I consider myself one of the most blessed people to have my passion and my vocation intersect at a place where real change is possible. I stand on the shoulders and follow in the footsteps of black women who have come before us, who have paved the way, who have set the bar. At the California Black Women's Health Project, our vision is a healthier future where black women are empowered to make choices, where there's equal access in health justice. That is who we are and that is what we aim to see. It makes me proud, and it gives me confidence to do this work and reminds me that it's been done before and that we will not stop.

What message do you wish to send to young black women who may not have resources or community, and who may feel alienated and underserved by our healthcare system?

Never go alone. This is difficult now because of Covid-19, when the healthcare system is restricting you from being accompanied by someone for appointments or emergency care. But we advocate for that because there is safety in numbers, and there's safety in more than one of you hearing the message. Both of you are able to speak up and say, "No, no. Explain that again," and "Why this?" You're making sure your 15-minute appointment doesn't turn into a five-minute appointment and that you actually receive the care you're supposed to receive.

The other thing I would say is, find your circle. Find your allies. That is part of the way we operate in our traditions. We are a communal people. Black women tend and befriend. We are a connected people, so isolation is dangerous to us. Avoid it. Find that circle of sisters you can trust.

What role does self-care play in black women's emotional or mental health? How does one integrate it into their life more?

Black women are so accustomed to caring for others because that is what we do. It's rooted in our history in this country, and it's rooted even in our African ancestry. We are used to making sure everyone else is fine. But at the California Black Women's Health Project we tell women that you cannot pour from an empty cup. When the cup starts to dry, you're losing yourself. So fill your cup. Sometimes it can be candles and bubble baths, but for some of us that is not enough. The real level of self-care is getting your rest, looking after yourself. It's learning to breathe every day. Our breath is so shallow all the time, so take those deep, rich breaths. Take time to just sit and be still, and learn to use the word no.

There is pressure on us all the time. That knee on the neck, proverbially, is always there. Sometimes we have to go into our own sanctuaries, into our own closets, into our own spaces, into our own heads, and find a safe place to get some rest.

What can people do to support you in addition to donating?

People are always asking me if it's enough if they give. That's important, because organizations like ours are so grossly underfunded. We are called to do way too much with way too little. However, in addition to the funding support, it's crucial for our allies to use their own systems and structures and the power around them to ensure that racism continues to be eradicated. Make sure you are not participating in inequities and disparities where you live and work. Use your power as much as you can to uplift another community and to speak out against problems.

Become an activist. That is something you can do, and it doesn't have to just be a financial investment. The ultimate goal is to eliminate the need for us to be in the streets, pushing and fighting. Eliminate the need for me to do that.

"Black women are so accustomed to caring for others because that is what we do. We are used to making sure everyone else is fine. But you cannot pour from an empty cup. "

ASHLEY

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DOWNS

Photography by **Mike Cohen | @mikecohenphotos**
HMUA **Stephanie Emma | @stephanieemma.makeupartist**
PR **LA Media Group | @la.mediagroup**

Happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? I started my career in exotic dancing in Devon which quickly transpired into a love of photography and modelling. Followed by acting and films.

What are some of your best career highlights so far? Having 5-6 million views worldwide on my movies and being part of the Playboy family has been the absolute pinnacle.

Social media is a very powerful tool, given your massive following, what are some of the challenges you face when it comes to marketing your brand and maintaining a solid following? Being original and innovative are key factors. You need to constantly reinvent yourself and keep your audience interested.

Can you give us breakdown of a typical day in the life of a glamourous model on set? A good nights sleep. The morning of the shoot zero underwear so you don't have marks on your skin. Two hours in hair and make up to bring out all your best features. And perhaps a bottle of champagne to get the creative juices flowing.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? The biggest misconception is that models in the adult industry don't have a brain for business and can't save money. Some of us are very business savvy in property and investments.

Now we know there are some pretty perks that come with being a beautiful woman, what would say are your favourite ones? Vip travel to exotic places would be my favourite. There is so much of this beautiful world to explore.

Given that you're a stunning woman who undoubtedly gets a lot of attention, what are some of the nicest things men have done to try and get your attention? I have been flown to Paris on a private jet for dinner. We spent half the night playing poker and I won. What a date this was.

What makes you feel absolutely sexy? Being fully naked makes me feel the best. Learn to love your curves your skin. Glowing confidence from the inside out is pure sex appeal.

3 things that you can't go a day without? Fresh coffee as soon as I get up.
Maison Frances perfume after a cool shower.
My dog and country walks.

Anything exciting we should be on the look out for coming through this year from you?
I have launched only fan's after so many people asking me. So I'm making lots of content for this.

Where can our readers find out more about you and stay updated with your current events and adventures?
My Instagram @ashley_downs_xoxo
My Twitter @ashleymilf1xxx
My only fans ashleydownsxxx

Playboy Interview

Chris Rock

A candid conversation with America's best stand-up comic about why black people are so cool, why Marion Berry is scary and why there's nothing sexier than a big ass

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID RENSIN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVID ROSE**

If President Clinton isn't Chris Rock's biggest fan, he ought to be. Consider how the 34-year-old comedian defended the chief executive during a tour stop this past winter in Atlantic City:

"They let Clinton off last week. Let him off! That's right, just let him go," said Rock, pacing back and forth onstage, eyes wide with mock surprise. Suddenly, he stops. "Wait… who's booing? What the fuck you booing about? How you gonna boo head? Have you really thought this over? What the fuck did Clinton do? He lied about a blow job so his wife wouldn't find out. Is that so fucking hard to figure out? You got to have a trial for that shit? Get the Supreme Court involved? You could have taken that to The People's Court."

Most comics would have stopped there. Not Rock. "Some of this is Hillary's fault. That's right. I put blame where blame is due. Women, you know your man better than anybody else. You know if you got the crazy, needs-a-blow-job-every-day man. Sometimes you got to save your man from himself. Sometimes you got to sacrifice your lips for the good of the country. Hillary let us all down. She's the first lady. She's supposed to

be the first one on her knees. Monica shouldn't have stood a chance. p'What you want, girl? Get out of here. I got this under control."'

Rock certainly has things under control. For almost five years he's been the hottest comic in the country, the darling of the public and his peers, a book author, recording artist, movie actor and host of HBO's Chris Rock Show. Credit his fearlessness at tackling issues such as race, politics, relationships, doctors, insurance, taxes, family dynamics, porn, pimps, crack, black leaders, false role models and the difference between the mall white people go to and the one they used to go to. Despite his success, Rock makes regular visits to the Museum of Television and Radio to study the likes of Woody Allen, Richard Pryor, Ernie Kovacs, Flip Wilson, Don Rickles, Groucho Marx, Steve Martin and Charlie Chaplin. And he still hones his material before last-call audiences at comedy clubs. Then it's all taken to the concert stage where, as in his Emmy award-winning HBO special, Bring the Pain, Rock works the audience with almost evangelical fervor.

Offstage, Rock is surprisingly calm and unassuming. He's a watcher, a thinker, curious. "I don't have to be the smartest person in the room," he says. "You don't learn that way." In other words, he's personable but not easy to get to know. But he can explain that too: "The only people easy to get to know are drug dealers and prostitutes. No matter where I go, people ask, p'How come you're so quiet?' Even in the library where you're supposed to be quiet. But I don't want to waste my powers. If Superman flew around all the time he might not be able to save Lois when it counts."

Rock was born on February 7, 1965 in South Carolina. His father, Julius, a union trucker, and mother, Rose, moved the family to Brooklyn. Eventually they settled on Decatur Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, on one of the nicer blocks in a notoriously bad part of town. The family was close, and Rock, as the oldest of six, quickly absorbed his parents' work ethic. He took on odd jobs and, as he got older, often accompanied his dad on rounds delivering the New York Daily News. He was also bused to a nearly all-white school, where he was regularly beaten up and came to learn the many epithets whites have for blacks. He didn't make it through high school—by choice.

Once, in 1983, when he was 18, working at Red Lobster and a huge Eddie Murphy fan, Rock waited in line at Radio City Music Hall to get a ticket to Murphy's show. But when he heard about an open-mike night at Catch a Rising Star, he left Murphy behind and headed to the club, tried out, made the cut and joined the comedy circuit. One night in 1987 it was Murphy's turn to watch Rock, and he liked what he saw. With Murphy's backing. Rock appeared on an HBO's Uptown Comedy Express special. In 1990 he followed in Murphy's footsteps on Saturday Night Live.

Three years and a couple memorable characters (including Nat X) later, Rock asked SNL executive producer Lorne Michaels to let him go his own way. The pressure to be the new Eddie Murphy had taken its toll. He also admits that he didn't work as hard on the show as he did at partying and spending his newfound money. Even so, he appeared in a few films (including New Jack City), was briefly on In Living Color, made an album (Born Suspect) and, in 1993, starred in the rap parody CB4, which he co-wrote and co-produced. It opened at number one at the box office, but from there both the film and Rock's career went downhill. He ended up right back where he started: playing little clubs. And there was another problem. His act had gone limp. One night in Chicago, upstaged by comedian Martin Lawrence, Rock came back to his senses. As he told Vanity Fair, "Martin just annihilated me. Blew my ass away. That was a pivotal moment, because I wasn't really prepared. I'd been working with too many white guys."

The reality check paid off. Rock recommitted himself to his craft, often traveling the country with comedian Mario Joyner, "the funniest man I know." (Joyner is also one of Jerry Seinfeld's best friends.) Rock took more risks onstage and started talking about things that really interested him. In 1996 Politically Incorrect host Bill Maher asked Rock to be that show's correspondent at the presidential conventions. Rock also taped Bring the Pain, featuring his new strutting stage manner as well as his popular "Niggas vs. Black People" routine. It was only a small part of the special, and Rock doesn't do it anymore, but it hit home.

Rock followed the special with an album (Roll With the New), a best-selling book (Rock This!) and an HBO variety-talk show (The Chris Rock Show), now in its third season. He also relaunched a movie career, with roles in Lethal Weapon 4, Kevin Smith's Dogma and Nurse Betty with Morgan Freeman. He's writing films as well, with Paramount greenlighting his remake of Heaven Can Wait, called I Was Made to Love Her. Finally, there's another HBO special, Bigger and Blacker, taped at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, and a new album by the same name. And let's not forget his role as pitchman for 1-800-Collect and his playing the voice of Li'l Penny for Nike.

Playboy asked Contributing Editor David Rensin, who co-authored Rock's book, to hook up with the comedian while he toured to get ready for his HBO special. Rensin's report:

"Most people who don't know him think Chris Rock in private is just like he was in Bring the Pain: loud, in your face, wearing a silky silver jacket and unable to sit still. Nothing is further from the truth. Rock says he never wore that ensemble again. He's also more prone to lose himself in his Walkman than cut up after a show. Where many performers are super-energized and looking for trouble, Rock is easy-going and happy to watch a film on the tour bus with his players—Ali LeRoi, Lance Crouther and his wife, Robin Montague, and Wanda Sykes, all writer-performers on The Chris Rock Show. He may be the boss, but he acts like one of the gang.

"After a show at Princeton University, we traveled to the Trump Marina hotel and casino in Atlantic City. At two A.M. the troupe convened for breakfast in the coffee shop. Rock led a freewheeling dialogue that covered favorite music from the 1970s and 1980s, favorite comedians, sports, the neighborhood, relationships. Later, in the casino, Rock wanted to cut loose and gamble a bit, but then a phalanx of low-rollers approached for autographs. Said one obviously single woman, p'You're gorgeous. I want to marry you someday.' Smiling, then sighing, Rock begged off and said, 'My life has changed. I used to blend in around white people.'

"We were scheduled to begin our first session after lunch in his hotel room, but at the last minute Rock decided we should go to the local mall for CDs and a radio, and do the interview as we shopped. We'd made mall runs together before, but this time there were no pals along—and no bodyguard. We entered on the upper level and hadn't been inside 30 seconds when we heard the first of what would become an afternoon full of variations on, p'Yo. It's Chris Rock. Is that Chris Rock? Hey man, how you doing?' and autograph requests. Rock motioned toward the tape recorder and politely declined—unless there were children involved—and just told me to keep walking and talking."

PLAYBOY: Everyone's staring.

ROCK: Keep walking. I'm from Brooklyn. If you come from a bad neighborhood you learn to notice everything around you. What I notice is there's no one in here who can whip my ass. Besides, I got you with me.

PLAYBOY: And you feel safe? All right, let's start with the accolades. Vanity Fair: "Funniest, smartest comic working today." New York Post: "Utterly fearless." The Washington Post: "His show is unfailingly funny." Lorne Michaels: "Chris is the shock of ideas." For a guy who only a few years ago called himself washed up, how much do you like what you hear?

ROCK: [*Laughs*] What do you want me to say? It's great. I'm glad they feel that way. They're all good sources and none of them had to say nice things about me before, including Lorne. I'm just glad I could

do something they like.
PLAYBOY: How has all the attention changed you?
ROCK: I feel like Travolta in Phenomenon, when he got zapped by the light. Nothing's going wrong. Yet. I still live in the same house—I just haven't been there much because I'm extremely busy. But when I go around my old neighborhood and see my old friends, the differences between me and them still seem minuscule. I had a good dad and another guy didn't; I didn't get high and another guy did. That's scary. I sometimes feel like I'm one bad break from being back there and never making it out in the first place.
PLAYBOY: What do you miss most about your old life?
ROCK: Being able to take a walk by myself. Now if I'm alone everyone assumes I want company. Being famous is like having big tits. People always stare. In some ways that's good, because a girl with big tits can go anywhere and people always want to do whatever they can for her.
PLAYBOY: Sure. In hopes of getting laid.
ROCK: With me I guess it's the hope of getting money or hanging out—and then getting laid. My friends are always trying to drag me somewhere so they can get laid. Tell anyone you're my manager and watch what happens. [Laughs] I guess I've got some huge tits right now. But that's okay. I deal with all of it because they're my fans. It's like each one bought a thread on this coat I'm wearing. They bought the tips of my shoelaces. They helped pay for everything I've got. So the handshakes, the hugs, they're good. People are just trying to connect. It could be much worse.
PLAYBOY: As in no one's paying attention?
ROCK: No. As in they could be burning my football jersey and smashing my Heisman trophy.
PLAYBOY: How much does it bother you that O.J. is still able to go to the mall?
ROCK: I'm not happy about it. I'm not rejoicing. Yeah, we know he did it, but he's one guy I don't think is going to kill again.
PLAYBOY: When does celebrity get most weird for you?
ROCK: When I get to hear about which star someone in my family wants to fuck. When people want to know my mood before they speak to me. I used to see this around Eddie Murphy and Lorne Michaels. "How's he feeling? What's his mood?" It's hysterical. When I say something offhand and it comes back to me. If I'm mildly interested in something, my whispers are heard miles away. The next thing I know, someone is in my office wanting to make a deal. The other day I said, "You know, The PJs was funny last night." Two days later my manager gets a call: "They hear you like The PJs. They want you to be a voice on the show." For all I know I was overheard in an elevator. When people give me stuff I don't need. I get free food when there are homeless folks who can't get any. I get sneakers. I don't need sneakers; I can buy sneakers. It's all about big tits. And it's ironic that the guy who no one listened to, everybody listens to now. The guy everyone used to beat up, a lot of people are scared of now. The guy who couldn't get laid, everybody wants to fuck now.

"If Malcolm X were as small as Martin Luther King, he'd have believed in nonviolence, too. If Martin Luther King were as big as Malcolm X he'd have been talking about "let me whup some ass.""

PLAYBOY: That sounds like a positive development.
ROCK: I just wanted the opportunity to make people laugh in as many different forms as I could: books, albums, my TV show, as a producer, in the movies and, first and foremost, as a stand-up comic. All I wanted was options. And now I have them, because all being rich and famous really means is that you've got more options.
PLAYBOY: Didn't you once say that fame was bullshit?
ROCK: Here's what I meant: People say, "I want to be rich and famous like you." No, they just want to be rich. Believe me. Fame is only cool if you want to meet somebody.
PLAYBOY: And you have. We read about you in the gossip columns, at one big event or another, like Puffy Combs's birthday bash.
ROCK: I knew Puffy 10 years ago. I was a little sluggo-ing comedian and he used to drive some guy's car. I've known a lot of these people forever. Look at Lauryn Hill. To most people she just got famous. I did a gig with her and the Fugees seven years ago at some little college. I played Nintendo with Will Smith 10 years ago, in Philadelphia at his crib, when I was in town doing a gig at the Funny Bone for $800. Talented people tend to hang out together. They know who's got the stuff. If you respect someone's work it's worth a dinner or two. Plus, when you're all in the same business there's the safety factor. We don't need shit from each other. We're not put in the position to turn people down; that happens too many times when you hang out with people who don't do what you do. Does that make sense without making me sound like a snob?
PLAYBOY: Is that something you and your friends discuss?
ROCK: Who asked for what is one of the biggest topics of conversation. Everybody tries to top each other: "So-and-so wants me to help him buy a Ferrari." "So-and-so asked me for 50 large." "My uncle is trying to buy a fleet of school buses." Everybody's got some crazy tale. The best I ever heard was when a friend of mine, who will remain nameless, went on a date with a girl and had sex with her, and before she even left she asked him to help her buy a house.
PLAYBOY: Did he?
ROCK: No. But I told him, "Your time together must have been really bad for her to say, 'You owe me now!'"
PLAYBOY: Will these observations ever end up as comic material?
ROCK: No. When I'm onstage I make $300 a week—though maybe I should give myself a raise to $500 for the millennium. No one wants to hear about my money. Nobody wants to hear about me hanging out with whoever's famous. Nobody wants to know about what a hassle it is sometimes to sign autographs. The fans just want me to be one of the guys. Be down. People want to hang out with their favorite comedian. They want to feel like he's the missing guy in their crew. "Fuck, I wish Chris was hanging." "Wouldn't it be great if Sandler was here tonight?" They want to feel comfortable with that guy. In their shoes, I did too.
PLAYBOY: How badly do you want Adam Sandler's kind of success?
ROCK: His success is nice. We both have the same philosophy: Work

work work, work work, work work work work. Album, movie, movie, album, movie, album. Get it out there. He's also one of the funniest guys. As big as he is, he's still underrated. He's a great stand-up comedian. Sandler's like Steven Wright with a dick—not that Steven Wright doesn't have one. I mean Sandler has an observational quality like Steven Wright, but his one-liners tend to be raunchier than Wright's.

PLAYBOY: And your approach to comedy is sort of like a fighter's.

ROCK: The crowd gives me a four-minute cushion: "Hey, he's famous. We saw him last month and he made us laugh." I try to hit them. Immediately. I don't try to fluff it that much, because a man's behavior is dictated by his physicality. I'm like a lightweight fighter, so I tell more jokes than a big guy. I've got to throw a lot of jokes. If Malcolm X were as small as Martin Luther King, he'd have believed in nonviolence, too. If Martin Luther King were as big as Malcolm X he'd have been talking about "let me whup some ass." It's no coincidence that the little guy was nonviolent and the big guy was violent.

PLAYBOY: Why did you choose to become a comedian?

ROCK: It's the only good deed I can do. I've never been talented at anything else, like sports or school. The only other thing that sparked my interest as a kid was being a civil rights attorney, or a reverend—that is, if I could find a religion that didn't dog people out and wasn't on some level racist, sexist and homophobic. Yeah, I'd probably preach the gospel.

PLAYBOY: But your act is already more than jokes. As Lorne Michaels said, you're the shock of ideas.

ROCK: I'm just a comedian, man. Just a comedian. The media think I'm out there with an agenda. No. That's Jesse's job. That's Sharpton's job. Everybody's looking for the leader. Everybody's looking for the next guy, and they always try to pin it on entertainers and athletes. But I'm not a candidate, and I'm not a messenger.

PLAYBOY: So you say and no doubt mean, yet your fans take your observations to heart. And the critics see all sorts of wisdom in your observations.

ROCK: People also listen to Urkel. Oprah says what I say, in her own way. A million rappers: Ice Cube. Chuck D. Public Enemy. NWA. And they did it years ago. I just happen to be the quotemeister right now—people are repeating things I've said, in other contexts. I just talk about what interests me. That's the most important thing: Can I interest myself? I don't want to be bored up there, because you'll be bored if I'm bored. And I don't want to sound like other comedians. I don't want to have the airplane hunk about seat backs and tray tables.

PLAYBOY: So what's the gospel according to Chris Rock?

ROCK: [Pauses] If anything, I'm not a hater. I'm probably the only black comic who isn't homophobic, who doesn't have a big fag hunk in his act.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about white people?

ROCK: I look at the individual. I probably could hate white people as a group, because when I went to school white kids would get together and beat the shit out of me. I'm still a little scared when I see whites in a group, but I've learned that all groups are stupid. What I hate is anyone who knows better yet chooses to be racist. On the other hand, if you don't know any black people and all you get is what you see in the news, I almost don't blame you for being a racist. But if you know a cool brother down the block, if you know me and you're still a racist, then you're a fucking idiot.

PLAYBOY: But you're not afraid to make fun of blacks or whites.

ROCK: [Long pause, shakes his head] I hate that hunk of mine, sometimes.

PLAYBOY: The "I love black people but I hate niggas" routine?

ROCK: Yeah, I'm so tired of that shit. Sometimes that's all people write about me, like I'm a one-joke comic or Ritchie Valens, only known for "La Bamba." They ignore everything else I've said and focus on that one thing.

PLAYBOY: It's certainly received the most attention.

ROCK: But if I didn't have the relationship stuff in my act, I wouldn't sell as many seats. No way in the world I'm playing these big houses just off so-called political shit. The relationship stuff sells the tickets, along with the stuff about insurance and doctors and malls. I talk about things that the average man cares about, stuff I care about. I've got insurance. I'm paying my mother's insurance bills. I'm thinking about the hypocrisy of the whole thing. Even when I was a kid, when I had my first car, it was like, Let me get this straight: The worse the neighborhood you live in, the more insurance you have to pay? Women in the inner city have to pay more for diapers and milk because they have to get them at the minimart because no grocery will build there? How fucking ignorant is that injustice?

"I'm just a comedian, man. The media think I'm out there with an agenda. No. That's Jesse's job. That's Sharpton's job."

PLAYBOY: True, but why does that make the "I hate niggas" material any less important?

ROCK: [*Sighs*] It's just that I hate white reporters talking to me about it without ever having watched Bring the Pain. They always ask, "How does a black audience deal with that stuff you're saying?" Take a look at the show! Were there any white people there that night? Not many. Were people laughing? Yes. What's the fucking question again? I'm in the middle of Maryland. Not even D.C., but the middle of the ghetto, in a theater that we spent money on to make look better—and it's full of black people. I purposely went into the hood to do it. But some writers act as if I did Bring the Pain in front of a joint session of Congress. I think what they're really saying is, "I like it, but how could black people possibly like it, since you're making fun of them?" Well, it looked to me like they were laughing. Whatever you see black people laughing at, that's what's funny to black people. It's like me going up to Garth Brooks after he plays the Grand Ole Opry and saying, "How do country people deal with your act?" Huh?

PLAYBOY: How are black audiences different from white audiences?

ROCK: For one thing, the black audience goes everywhere first. They dictate everything from music to comedy to fashion; they point to where the white audience is going to go. Who's going to be the hottest comedian in the year 2001? I don't know—but he's working in front of a bunch of brothers right now. Who'll be the hottest rapper? I don't know, but young black kids know right now. Black people are about the future. White people are all about the past and how to return to the fucking glory they had. Black makes everything cool. What are the Spice Girls without the black girl? Just three white bitches who can barely sing. What's the Rat Pack without Sammy Davis? A bunch of fucking alcoholics. My core audience is probably black, but I don't think white people want to see me water down my thing. The white

people who are into me aren't afraid. They want me to be me.
PLAYBOY: Perhaps the question you don't like stems from white journalists having to be so cautious. They can't get away with saying "nigger." They'd be crucified. So they don't understand when black people laugh at someone who does.
ROCK: White people can't go around saying "nigger." That's a rule. Black people can; it's like calling your kid an idiot. Only you can call your kid that. Someone else calls your kid an idiot, there's a fight. You know, I said some ill shit in that special. I did jokes about porn and killing the president and hitting women. I had a guy beating a woman, and her complaining about it on Oprah. But no one mentioned that to me. Here's why: Race is big. It's the last frontier.
PLAYBOY: Who takes the truth about themselves better, blacks or whites?
ROCK: Probably blacks. We're used to being criticized and we deal with it easier. We're always expecting the hit.
PLAYBOY: How concerned are you about media backlash? You're on top now, but that also makes you a target.
ROCK: I don't worry about the mainstream media. They don't have much to do with making black artists succeed. There's no successful black artist without 90 percent of the black vote. Any black artist with longevity, black people already love, and he'd be successful—though maybe not stupendously—without the crossover. If white people had never gotten Richard Pryor he'd still have a big house and money. Bernie Mac, Jamie Foxx, Frankie Beverly, they all live really well. Steve Harvey lives really, really well.
PLAYBOY: Would black recognition be enough for you?
ROCK: Yeah.
PLAYBOY: So why the desire to cross over?
ROCK: Financial reasons. Black artists don't want white people to like them. That's real Uncle Tom. It's the money. Everybody wants to make the most dough they can because we're in an industry where you can be over at any moment. The idea is to cross over to white dollars, not to white people.

"Alex and I weren't as close as we had been. But neither of us has had problems getting along with teammates before, so I don't see why we would have problems now. It gives the media something to write about, though."

PLAYBOY: What's the best career advice you ever got?
ROCK: Before I taped Bring the Pain I bumped into Andrew Dice Clay. Anybody who knows Dice knows he can't help but give you advice every time he sees you—good or bad. But when you really think about it, who knows more about doing an HBO special than Dice? Who's gotten more out of being on HBO than Dice? Who filled up Madison fucking Square Garden? He said, "Watch Rocky and you'll remember why you got started. Everything will come back to you." They say I'm big, but I can't ignore a guy who filled the Garden. And he was right. I watched Rocky and it all came into focus. It's the best inspirational movie in the world. All schoolkids should be forced to watch Rocky. The lesson is try your best, no matter what, and you'll feel good at the end. Be better than your best. That's my career philosophy. Buster Douglas was a bum. But one night he fought Tyson better than his best, and he won.
PLAYBOY: Do you have any advice for Tyson?
ROCK: Watch Rocky [laughs]. Stop drinking. Mike is insecure. The last time I bumped into Mike was at some show at Roseland. We ended up going to Jersey to a party. It was two or three in the morning, and we were both sitting there trying to figure out if we could have gotten our wives if we weren't rich. This big motherfucker and this little guy, both from Brooklyn, connected on the same thing. We couldn't figure it out. Neither one of us was confident enough. Both of us were like, "Nah, nobody likes us for us." It says nothing bad about our wives and everything about us.
PLAYBOY: You recently went to Richard Pryor's birthday party. What's he like these days?
ROCK: It's really sad. He can't talk. Richard fucking Pryor, the greatest orator, the greatest comedian of all time, and he can't talk. What the fuck is that? It's like Fred Astaire being paralyzed.
PLAYBOY: What made Pryor great?
ROCK: He was honest.
PLAYBOY: The same has been said of you. According to HBO president of programming Chris Albrecht, you can "get away with being honest in a way few people can."
ROCK: I don't get away with anything. I just do it. It has to be instinctual. The minute that I start to analyze my act, I'm dead.
PLAYBOY: Come on. Maybe you want to play it down, but you must think this stuff through.
ROCK: Sometimes when I come off the stage I feel like the Incredible Hulk, when he turns back into David Banner. Did I kill anybody? Did I hurt anybody? I feel like that a lot, especially when it's a good night. I get in a weird zone because my act gets my complete attention. In sex, my mind can drift, but onstage it's do or die. When I walk into a comedy club I want motherfuckers to be scared I'm going on. "Oh shit. I don't want to follow him." I don't want the he's-famous-let's-cut-him-some-slack funny. When Rodney Dangerfield walks into the Improv, they know he's getting ready to bring the noise. It's like, get the fuck back! This guy is 70-something and he's going to blow everybody off the stage. That's what I want.
PLAYBOY: How do you feel about once having been called the new Eddie Murphy?
ROCK: Every hot black guy is the new Eddie Murphy. But I think I've established myself as my own guy. The first time I heard it I felt a bit of pressure; more than, say, Damon Wayans or Sinbad did, because folklore has it I was discovered by Eddie Murphy. People were looking for that from me.
PLAYBOY: Is the folklore bullshit?
ROCK: The average person thinks I was driving a bus and Eddie said, "Hey, this guy is funny." I had been in the comedy business for a few years. Eddie said I was funny on camera and in print—which is a bigger thing than any manager or agent could do—and he got me on this show called The Uptown Comedy Express, an HBO special he developed and produced. When the funniest guy in the world says you're funny, well, you—
PLAYBOY: Feel like, holy shit, what do I do?
ROCK: I just did what I was doing and people said, "He's funny, but he's no Eddie Murphy."
PLAYBOY: But only a few years earlier you were 18 and standing in line at Radio City on your night off from a job at Red Lobster, waiting to get a ticket to Murphy's show, when you suddenly split to do open-

microphone night at Catch a Rising Star. Murphy was and is your hero, yet you blew off the show. What possessed you?

ROCK: Something called to me. Every comedian will tell you the same thing. There's no big revelation. It seemed like a better option than waiting in line.

PLAYBOY: Was it your first time onstage?

ROCK: Yeah. There was a guy on my block who co-managed R&B singer Freddie Jackson. He represented show business to me. I also knew Saturday Night Live was looking for people. So I told him, out of the blue, "Get me on Saturday Night Live." Obviously, I was an idiot at that point, thinking you could just get on Saturday Night Live. The guy said, "You have to go to the Comic Strip, you have to audition. You need to go to the clubs." I guess it put a little germ in my head—so one night I did it. Or maybe it was because I was at the end of a long-assed line and probably wasn't going to get in to see Eddie anyway.

PLAYBOY: How big a career jump was getting on Saturday Night Live?

ROCK: Huge. To this day, the biggest. It was the last break that actually changed my life. When I got on Saturday Night Live I moved from a studio apartment into a huge duplex, I bought a car, I helped my mother get a house. Nothing like that has happened to me since. Even today the quality of my life is pretty much the same. When I used to get $50 or $300 a gig, every gig would change my life. It meant I was going to eat differently. I might buy sneakers so I'd have a new wardrobe. Today the only changes are more artistic options, and a lot of white people speak to me.

PLAYBOY: What went wrong at Saturday Night Live?

ROCK: Lorne hired me because I was funny and because In Living Color had just come on. I don't think it was coincidence. The first year I was alone, which was perfect. If you're black you might as well be the only black person there. You're competing enough as it is to get a little screen time. Then it was me, Tim Meadows and Ellen Cleghorne. We all wanted to star in our own pieces, but we weren't all going to get on each show—even if all our stuff was great. The show is no different than society. But I'll never dog Saturday Night Live, because it's the best thing that's ever happened to me. Another problem is that I followed Eddie Murphy. Whatever I did was compared with him, and that's unfair. I had tough shoes to fill. I had the Larry Holmes gig.

PLAYBOY: What's your relationship with Eddie like these days?

ROCK: We're cool. I always looked at Eddie like my older cool cousin, the one, when you're a kid, that you can't wait to see because he's got the tapes and cool clothes. He's getting laid and he's got stories. I'm never going to be Eddie's equal, and friends have to be equals to be friends. But that said, we're better friends than we were before.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you also party a lot during your three years on Saturday Night Live, sometimes to distraction?

ROCK: We all partied. I also got a big-ass apartment, a convertible Vette. What's cornier than a red Vette driving through Brooklyn? How obnoxious is that? I was ridiculous. Lorne Michaels told me, and he was right: "Everybody loses their first money. No matter who you are, you're going to lose your first money." That first hunk I got, though it couldn't set me up for life, could have helped. But I lost it. I spent it on shit I couldn't afford: a car, not paying taxes. My whole life was just trying to fuck girls I had no business fucking—and I succeeded on several occasions [*laughs*]. Ah, those were the days.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like you miss them.

ROCK: I miss the innocence. Otherwise I was tired, I looked like shit. In pictures of me back then I look like I was on the pipe.

PLAYBOY: You were hot, left Saturday Night Live, made a couple movies and then you were gone. You couldn't even get an agent. What happened? How did you work your way back?

ROCK: After Saturday Night Live, I co-wrote, produced and starred in CB4. Probably made $18 million. We did it with Brian Grazer and Ron Howard's company, Imagine. Ron Howard was in the movie, but he cut himself out. He saw how shitty the movie was and said, "Hey, I can't be in this." In his scene he says, "When I first heard the song 'Sweat of My Balls'…" Ron Howard saying "sweat of my balls" is pretty funny. Cut to three years later and I get a call to do Sgt. Bilko with Steve Martin. I thought, great, but it was essentially an extra part. Two lines. I felt like shit, but you've got to do what you've got to do. A lot of guys wouldn't go to the audition. I do what I've got to do. The worst gig in show business is better than the best job out of it. I would have been the stand-in for the extra if I had to. And if I didn't take that extra part I wouldn't be where I am right now. That same year I did a guest shot on Fresh Prince of Bel Air. It was a horrible episode. I had to be Will Smith's ugly date, so I was in drag. Barely funny. I had to do it, though. From Saturday Night Live to New Jack City to CB4 to being dressed up like an ugly bitch for Will Smith.

"Black makes everything cool. What are the Spice Girls without the black girl? Just three white bitches who can barely sing. What's the Rat Pack without Sammy Davis Jr.? Just a bunch of fucking alcoholics."

PLAYBOY: Did you have to kiss him?

ROCK: No, but I'm glad they offered me the part. I needed it at the time. And guess what? People on the street were going, "Hey, I saw you on Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "Hey, I saw you in Sgt. Bilko." It kind of kept me alive. It's not shoveling shit, but I definitely went backward to get forward. I did Sgt. Bilko because it was Grazer, Steve Martin, Dan Aykroyd, Phil Hartman. I got to be around all those guys, even if it was only for two days. There was some value in doing it. Association brings assimilation, as my mother says.

PLAYBOY: How often do you get back to the old neighborhood?

ROCK: I still talk to people there. But one of the last times I went around I almost got carjacked. This guy was following me; I ran a light and he ran the light. When you grow up in Bed-Stuy you have an extra sense for trouble. The next thing I know, I'm on a high-speed chase with three cars behind me. I was probably going about 60 or 70 miles an hour through the streets of Brooklyn, running lights.

PLAYBOY: What would have happened if they'd caught you?

ROCK: They would have taken me to my crib, made me open up, taken everything, duct taped me and maybe killed me. They wanted my shit. And kidnapping's big. This is what's going on now. The only guys my age with dough who aren't entertainers sell drugs. Drug dealers keep their money in their house. I don't keep money in mine, but these young guys probably think I have a million dollars under my bed.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like you can't really go home again.

ROCK: I'm not going back there like "look at me." I like to sit on the stoop and talk. Usually it's okay. When I first get there it's an immediate, "Chris is here!" But that always happened no matter what job I had. As far as my neighborhood is concerned, I made it 10 years ago when I was in the movie I'm Gonna Git You Sucka. Do you know how far that is from Bed-Stuy and hanging out watching my friends sell lactose as coke? Or making crack: cocaine, lactose, vitamin B-12, a little baking soda. The common Friday night thing was to get with a bunch of friends at six o'clock. But then people started getting high and no one would go anywhere. It would start with the first beer, to the first joint, to the first snort, to freebasing. Every fucking Friday. I never got or get high, thank God.

PLAYBOY: Did that self-destructive experience make it any easier for you to understand Chris Farley's death?

ROCK: No. I took it really hard. He was a great friend. A good, jolly—I know that's a fat word—guy to be around. He needed hugs but he was quick to give them too. When I was off the show, with no career, he and Sandler were the only guys who'd call to see how I was doing. Farley was way funnier than we've ever seen him be. He was more like W.C. Fields than the character he usually played. He had a "get away from me kid, you bother me" funny mean streak, but then he'd give the kid a big hug. But in movies he always played this fat guy who didn't know any better, who straightened up at the last minute.

"Everybody wants to make the most dough they can because we're in an industry where you can be over at any moment. The idea is to cross over to white dollars, not to white people."

The last time I saw him I pretty much had to get rid of him. I was in Chicago, on tour, and Chris came to see me. He was so fucked up. He was screaming. He wanted more booze. We had made plans, but I had to say, "You know what? I'm going to bed." It was only midnight. Right then he kind of straightened out for a minute: "Come on, Rocker. Come see my apartment. Come on, Rocker." I couldn't, and that's the last time I saw him. He died a month after that.

I miss Farley a lot. Phil Hartman too. It made for a really shitty year, losing both of them. The worst thing that they did was try to make other people happy offstage. They went out of their way for other people for the sake of their own happiness, and it killed both of them.

PLAYBOY: What was your relationship with Hartman like?

ROCK: Phil was a mentor. He was the most prepared guy at Saturday Night Live. He could also show you about the good life. Sometimes he'd call me into his office and say, "Hey, look at this picture of my new boat." "Hey, here's the house I'm buying. You work hard, you can get this too." But Phil had a weird marriage. He was always going through some shit with it, and I never liked to spend time with them as a couple. Every now and then he'd talk about it. I remember him saying, "Okay. If I lose half my shit I'll have to be on the show another three years." In part because of what happened, I'm really into my own happiness and my own comfort now in a way I wasn't before. I'm probably a rougher person to be around than before they died. I would never rock the boat. I'd go along with the program even if I was miserable. The old me would take shit for a while and then explode. After Farley and Hartman died, and died not happy, the idea of toeing the company line made me think, Fuck this. I'm more assertive now. I've found the courage to say no. They say life is short. No, it's not. Life is long. Life is excruciatingly long if you make bad decisions and do things you don't want to do.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about what you want to do—and what you have done for three seasons: The Chris Rock Show. Why did you want to try talk on cable, particularly when you could have had your own sitcom?

ROCK: I had nothing else happening at the time. I was bubbling under, doing Politically Incorrect, doing Li'l Penny. I had done Big Ass Jokes, which won the Cable Ace award. I was on a little upswing. It was HBO's idea. It was like, whoa, get my own show? This is great. We made the deal before Bring the Pain, and the success of the special just made things go quicker.

PLAYBOY: You're a TV interviewer now. Who's your role model?

ROCK: Bob Costas. Best in the world. I saw Bob Costas interview Little Richard once. At the time Little Richard was a fucking joke to me. Just a clown. When Costas got through with him, I was Little Richard's biggest fan. I saw Bob do that with a lot of people. He had all the best questions.

PLAYBOY: What have you learned?

ROCK: I look at an interview like I look at a woman I'm trying to get with. You have to avoid the obvious, especially if you're not a good-looking guy. I'm not, so it's all going to be verbal. If she's tall, don't mention it. If her name is Eve, don't say a joke with Adam in it. The second rule is to never ask a question if you know the answer. If somebody's got a hit movie, "Boy, your movie's really big. How does it feel?" What are they going to say? They're going to say it feels great. Why ask that? Rule three is you can get away with a lot if you say "with all due respect."

PLAYBOY: When you interviewed Magic Johnson why did you concentrate on his HIV? What wasn't obvious about that?

ROCK: Who has asked Magic Johnson, "How has it affected your business?" I even gave Magic one of those hard-to-ask questions: "Do women still hit on you?" His ego wants to say yes, but he has to say no. He kind of went in the middle of it: "Women like successful men." That's what you're looking for. He was great. He was the best guy I've probably had on this year. [Smiles] You know, I think he's got a new strain of AIDS, the kind that makes you gain weight and make money.

PLAYBOY: Why wasn't he any good when he did the interviewing?
ROCK: Magic Johnson is supposed to suck at being a talk show host just like I'm supposed to suck at being point guard for the Los Angeles Lakers. It's no dis to him. He gave it a good shot.
PLAYBOY: Will former D.C. mayor Marion Barry ever come on your show—especially after you made fun of him in Bring the Pain?
ROCK: I bumped into Marion Barry. He shook my hand. He said I shouldn't do the jokes. And as I looked in his eyes I realized, if he wasn't the mayor or a public figure, he'd beat the shit out of me. He's not the mayor right now. If I bumped into Marion Barry again he'd probably kick my fucking ass. No doubt in my mind. If nobody was around, Marion Barry would beat the shit out of me.
PLAYBOY: So that's why you have a bodyguard.
ROCK: Yes. Just for Marion Barry [laughs].
PLAYBOY: What's your take on the tragedy at Columbine High in Colorado?
ROCK: It's a big gun problem. And you know, one kid was on Prozac, but the toxicology report found no Prozac in him. I don't want to sound insensitive, but what ever happened to just being crazy? Everyone's looking for reasons, but no one's mentioned that maybe those guys were just fucking nuts. When I was a kid, those kids would have been put on a yellow bus and sent to a little classroom away from everybody, and nobody would have been shot. When I went to school, there were probably a couple kids who didn't belong, but no one got shot.
PLAYBOY: Maybe it's just frustrated middle-class white kids with access to guns who don't know how else to deal with not being popular.
ROCK: Right. Black people can't go, "I'm going to buy machine guns." They'd never leave the store. The cops would be called immediately. You can't buy any bomb-making stuff either if you're black. You can't even say "bomb" if you're black. As soon as you say "bo" you're arrested. B-o. You don't even get to the m. It's true! There are no black serial killers, right? You know why that is? Because a brother does one murder and they get him. It's like we're fucking suspects for everything. The white man gets the benefit of the doubt. I'm sure there are black people who would love to be serial killers, but they've never been given the chance. It's really sad. The law comes down on us too fucking hard.
PLAYBOY: Can the media and the internet and goth music be blamed for what happened?
ROCK: Blame the media? What was Hitler listening to? How come no one ever questions what Hitler was listening to? What movie did Hitler see that fucking set him off? He was just a crazy, evil guy. This whole "listened to" thing is bullshit to me. If you're dumb enough to kill somebody because you listen to Marilyn Manson, then we ought to get you early. We ought to eliminate you right away. What's Milosevic listening to? He's killing everybody, and I'm sure he's not listening to Marilyn Manson. What were they listening to during feudalism? The only people happy about those kids being shot are JonBenet's parents. They're like, "Hey, boy, now they're going to leave us alone." [Pauses] That's a joke.
PLAYBOY: Let's move on. Your movie career is in high gear. Besides the stuff we've seen you in, what are you being offered?
ROCK: Mostly con men. A numbers runner in Beverly Hills. Or I steal cars in Beverly Hills. That's the big thing: a fish out of water. You know what? I've got money and I'm famous and when I'm in Beverly Hills I am a fucking fish out of water. I walk into Barneys and I can afford whatever I want, but I'm still a freak. Jerry Seinfeld walking through Bensonhurst is a fish out of water. You don't need to be a fucking drug kingpin to be a fish out of water. Eddie called me a couple months ago and said, "I see what you're doing, the supporting actor thing here and there. Don't do that no more. You have to star in your next movie. Now's the time. Strike while the iron is hot. Don't fucking blow this."
PLAYBOY: Did you take his advice?
ROCK: Yes. I can't just wait around to be cast. The really successful guys are the ones who develop their own shit. So I co-wrote a script with my guys, and Paramount greenlighted it and we're going to start shooting in January.
PLAYBOY: What's it about?
ROCK: It's a remake of Heaven Can Wait or Here Comes Mr. Jordan. It's called There Goes Mr. Rock [smiles]. No, it's called I Was Made to Love Her.
PLAYBOY: You're in Kevin Smith's newest film, Dogma, as Rufus, the 13th apostle. The movie's subject matter—a critique of Catholicism—has caused a fair amount of controversy. Is that what attracted you to the project?
ROCK: Kevin's other movies, Clerks and Chasing Amy, just spoke to me.
PLAYBOY: What was it like working with Smith?
ROCK: Kevin holds the most intense rehearsals. When you get to the set, your lines and blocking have to be second nature. You're prepared. You're in shape. It takes hours—morning until night. I wanted to do it, especially since I'm not an actor like the other people in the movie: Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, Linda Fiorentino, Alan Rickman, Salma Hayek. I need the extra work and it was like free acting school. It's definitely the best work I've done. It broke me out of all my moves.
PLAYBOY: How did that compare to your Lethal Weapon experience?
ROCK: In the beginning I was really scared because it was the fourth one, like Alien 4 and Batman 4. Part of what convinced me is that the script turned out good. Also, Joel Silver admitted to me that number three wasn't all that great. I figured, okay, if you're going in with that attitude, four is going to be okay.
PLAYBOY: How much did you have to bulk up?
ROCK: I just had to fight my ass off and get my lines up. I don't mean that in a bad way, but I was pretty much an extra. Lethal Weapon was a weird movie. I'd been filming for a month, or at least I'd been on the set for a month, and I hadn't done anything. Then, one day, the whole cast did The Rosie O'Donnell Show, and I did well. I killed m'em. But I'm a comedian. I'm supposed to do better than Danny Glover and Mel Gibson on a comedy show. When Joel Silver and Dick Donner saw it they said, "We've got to get him in the movie more!" It's like I'd inadvertently auditioned for a movie I was already in. From then on it was like, "Hey, we've got this scene for you." "Hey, what about this scene?"
PLAYBOY: In Nurse Betty you work with Morgan Freeman. Do older black men want to mentor you?
ROCK: Morgan's more of a mentor than Danny. I guess I look for it. I ask questions. Maybe I'll linger longer than I should. My dad's dead and I love guys my dad's age: "Tell me something I don't know, please." Any black guy in his 50s or 60s, I'm like, "Please talk to me. Pleeease." Danny is kind of eccentric; also smart and well educated. He knows African history, is very politically active. He told me about his college days, about the Panthers. It's a perspective I'm just not going to get from a white guy. In Nurse Betty Morgan Freeman has to kiss someone. Turns out it's the first time he has had to kiss a woman on-screen—and he's 60-whatever years old! That's got to be hard. Morgan is one of our best actors and, due to petty racism, no one's ever paired him with a woman, ever. Morgan fucking Freeman. You know how many ugly white guys get women in movies? When he told me I couldn't believe it.

PLAYBOY: Which of his movies is your favorite?
ROCK: Believe it or not, the most significant Morgan moment for me, and this sounds crazy, is Deep Impact. He plays the president of the United States, he's a black guy, and no one said shit. His color is never mentioned in the movie or in reviews. He is such a commanding presence that it's obvious he's the president. I don't think there's another black actor who could play the president without it being a big deal.
PLAYBOY: According to you we already have a black president: Bill Clinton.
ROCK: Yes, but I said it two years before all this impeachment bullshit, because of how much he was persecuted. I hate hearing people saying it now.
PLAYBOY: Why?
ROCK: Because after the Monica Lewinsky thing it was used to make it sound like this: Since Clinton—our black president—has low morals, so do my people. That's not what I meant. In an interview with The New York Times, the reporter asked me about Clinton and really tried hard to get me to say that. "Why do blacks support Clinton?" "We feel persecuted," I said. "We feel overwatched." He wanted me to say, "Because we all cheat" or whatever.
PLAYBOY: Most blacks supported Clinton.
ROCK: Blacks supported Clinton because Clinton supported blacks. It's that simple. Clinton appointed black people without making a fucking big deal out of it. He just did it. Any time the Republicans want to show off they say, "Hey, we've got J.C. Watts here! We've got a black guy." They have to point it out, which is racist in itself. Let's just be people. Clinton hires black people and doesn't say shit. If one fucks up, he'll hire another one. He'll hire the best person for the job, whatever their skin color.
PLAYBOY: Do you think Clinton committed perjury?
ROCK: Clinton was on trial for lying about something that wasn't even a crime. There was no crime committed before he had to answer the questions. That's what they tried to take him down for. That's ridiculous. Perjury because he didn't want to say he fooled around? Do you get an extra sentence if you tell the judge, "I wasn't speeding"? That's some shit they made up for John Gotti and Al Capone. Clinton is not Al Capone.
PLAYBOY: You mentioned Oklahoma Representative J.C. Watts. Do the words black Republican bother you?
ROCK: Not theoretically. It just confuses me that they want to hang out with guys who clearly don't like black people. Don't they realize that white Republicans are just letting them hang out so nobody can say they don't have any black guys around? It's a bold move on his part. It's nothing special to be a black Democrat, so that's one way to make a splash.
PLAYBOY: How did he do on your show?
ROCK: Even though he played to an uptown crowd that was probably 99.9 percent Democrat, he had the fucking audience. And he worked it. He explained his position in a coherent way that people could understand. I got some jabs in, but he had the audience—until he fucked up because he didn't know who George Clinton is [laughs]. I asked, "What do you do when George Clinton comes to town?" He said, "Who's George Clinton?" and the air went out of the studio.
PLAYBOY: How much does it bother you when you don't have the crowd?
ROCK: I've got the crowd. It's my show. It doesn't matter. That's why a lot of talk show guys fuck up. They think they have to get every joke. I figure if they like the guest, they like me. If everybody's funny, I'm funny. Do you want to be Magic Johnson and pass the ball and get everyone involved or do you want to be someone who scores 80 points a game but doesn't win shit? When Michael Jordan started passing the ball he started winning. Johnny Carson is the greatest assist man in the history of the game. The biggest mistake guys make is thinking they have to be the only funny one on their show. When I had on Darryl Hughley, he killed. He was so funny. That meant I looked great.

"Being famous is like having big tits. People always stare at you. In some ways that's good, because a girl with big tits can go anywhere she wants and people always want to do whatever they can for her."

PLAYBOY: Speaking of assists, why did you decide to fund the Howard University Lampoon?
ROCK: We need new black writers. It's the only way for us to get decent TV shows and movies. We can't sit around waiting for white guys to write good black shit. I'm reading submissions now. Then I'm going to assemble and edit the first issue.
PLAYBOY: Do you like any of the stuff that you've seen?
ROCK: Most of it's okay-to-bad, but that's how it is with all art. I figure if the writer is 18 and I get hold of him now and work on the bad habits, he might be a real writer in a year or two.
PLAYBOY: You're far more sophisticated than these kids. Can you let them be who they are?
ROCK: Yeah. I know they're kids. I'm not looking for stuff for my show. This is a college comedy paper. That's right: I grade papers. I'm Professor Rock.
PLAYBOY: What is the worst job you had as a kid?
ROCK: [Laughs] I used to clean up dog shit. No one walks their dogs in the freezing New York winter; they just let them shit in the backyard. When the spring thaw came there were a bunch of people on the block with shit all over, and I was the shit boy. The phone would ring: "Hey, can you come over and clean up my backyard?" They wouldn't say "clean up the shit," but I knew what time it was.
PLAYBOY: How old were you?
ROCK: Probably 12, 13. I took any job I could get. I liked having my own job. That's why sometimes it's weird to hear, "You're rich, you have all this now." I've always had more money than my friends because I've always worked.
PLAYBOY: How do you explain the early work ethic?
ROCK: My dad worked all the time, so I figured I should. It wasn't even the money. If you're a little boy, you want to be a man. And to me, a man worked. I shoveled snow when it was cold and shit when

it thawed. And you know what? It wasn't fun, but if I had to shovel shit again I wouldn't waste a day. Back then I never said, "How dare this happen to me!" I was a kid; I was supposed to be shoveling shit.
PLAYBOY: Do you own a dog today?
ROCK: My wife got one about a year ago. But I'm not cleaning shit no more.
PLAYBOY: How about having kids?
ROCK: I'm not ready.
PLAYBOY: Does the pressure your dad faced—and died of—to support a family scare you?
ROCK: I can afford a kid, but I don't want another job right now, let's put it that way. On the other hand, I'd be a real good dad, and I'd probably stop doing comedy on some level and become the guy doing it all for his kids. I used to look at my dad and think, What does he really want to do? Does he really want to come home all tired? He was beat. Beat the fuck down. We'd be out there playing stickball or whatever and he'd try to throw the ball at you. He'd throw it twice and his arm would fall off. He had to go in the house and rest. He was just tired a lot. I don't want to be that fucking tired.
PLAYBOY: Aren't you anyway?
ROCK: Not like him. I'm sure my father wanted a family to take care of and to get the love you can only get from a family. But, at the same time, he worked every fucking day. I haven't really done anything for all this shit I have. My dad worked. He supported people. He had kids. The kids wanted to go to school, the kids wanted bikes. The wife wanted something else. I work, but I'm not under the stress my dad was under. All my stress is based on worrying how I'll be perceived if I do bad work. It's not the same. I'll still eat. I really miss my dad. His death changed me, made me go into a shell I'm still not out of. Made me take more risks because it could be over in a second. It makes me sad that he didn't live to see what I've done. He would've eaten it up. We'd be going to the fights; we'd have season tickets to the Mets. My dad would be at the Dodgers' spring training right now in Vero Beach. If he were still around, I would have made it all happen.

PLAYBOY: How much does your mom enjoy your success?
ROCK: She's having a ball. She has a house in South Carolina, runs a day care center. She never shies away from doing stuff. I have to tell her not to: "What do you mean you're doing Ricki Lake?" [Pauses] My whole family is doing fine. They're all working. Brian works on the show; he's a production assistant and he's worked his way up. I'm not one who likes to pay people to do nothing, to just hang out with me. My brother Andre just bought a truck to haul garbage from New York to Pennsylvania. He has the steadiest gig as far as I'm concerned. I have the shakiest job in the family. But I can still appreciate what's happened to me and to my comfort level. The difference between me and my wife is that she complains about the maid and I can't believe I have a maid. I'm dumbfounded. I like that I can buy two slices of pizza. I've never been hungry in my whole life, but if you want more, you should be able to get more.
PLAYBOY: On the subject of getting some, we've noticed on your show that you seem to have a fondness for Latin women. Would you care to explain?
ROCK: Gorgeous women. Look at them. Have you ever been to the Puerto Rican Day parade? It's the most beautiful thing in the world. They are beautiful people. I love my people but boy—
PLAYBOY: Latina for you is exotic?
ROCK: It's exotic. American jails are filled with men over drug offenses and shit. Latin jails are filled up with men going crazy over their women. They are passionate about their women. If you fuck with them they'll lose their mind and kill you. Why? Their women have the best pussy in the world. Puerto Rican girls, man. Gorgeous. In bed it's "Mami," "Papi." What's better than some woman calling you Papi?
PLAYBOY: And you would know from experience?
ROCK: I've been called Papi a couple times, but long, long ago.
PLAYBOY: What do you love physically about black women?
ROCK: Probably the black ass. I hate women who hide the big ass. Don't hide the big ass. It's for all of us. Share this gift. Share your big ass with all of us. We don't have to touch it or anything, but don't hide the big ass. Let us see it. Let us worship it. Let us pay it compliments. Let us tip our hats to the big ass. Love the big ass. And I'm not alone. Brothers love ass. There was an episode of Real Sex on HBO. They went from a black strip club to a white strip club. It was so funny. The white strip club was all about tits. The black strip club, ass. It was all about ass.
PLAYBOY: When you look in the mirror now, what do you see?
ROCK: A skinny guy who needs to get his teeth fixed. I could also use an extra 15 pounds.
PLAYBOY: Let's wrap this up. Bill Cosby blazed the trail for Richard Pryor, who opened it up for Eddie Murphy, who set the stage for you. Will the success you've had make it tougher or easier for the next guy?
ROCK: I hope it will be easier, but maybe tougher artistically, like Richard Pryor made it tough. He did stuff 20 years ago that no one has matched, partly because he's brilliant and partly because he got to do it first.
PLAYBOY: What did you do first?
ROCK: I can't say without sounding like an idiot. [Pauses] I talked about race in a different way; I'll go that far.
PLAYBOY: Are you worried about the next new guy?
ROCK: I never look at anything as a competition. Someone else's success never comes out of my paycheck. I don't need my friends to fail for me to succeed. To me it's just, "Let's do good work." The function of the comedian is to get as many laughs as he can by doing whatever works for him. Everybody wants to buy his mother a house. Whatever you do to get that house is the right thing. We all do our own things, from Dice to Eddie Murphy putting on a leather suit. One of the happiest times in my life was when I was eight years old and my friends and I had cool bikes—and they were all the same bikes. I was happy because everyone was equal.

PLAYMATE

RACHAEL CAVALLI

Instagram **@officialrachaelcavalli**

Photography by **Arthur St. John | @arthurstjohn**
HMUA **Taylor Jazz | @taylorjazz**
Location **Phillip Lamond**

Favorite color? Pink

Favorite movie of all time? Favorite actor? Don't Tell Mom BabySitters Dead / Mathew McConahay

Beach or pool? Beach

Read the book or watch the movie? Watch movie

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

If you could be an animal, what would you be and why? Lion because I like the way they carry them selves. Powerful.

What attracts you the most in a man? Confidence, mannerisms and smile.

Biggest turn on? Biggest turn off? Fragrance of a person/Narcissist.

Describe your perfect date. Anything on beach.

Describe yourself using 3 adjectives. Crazy Sexy Cool.

Tell us a secret nobody else knows... It wouldn't be a secret if I tell everyone.

Where is your favorite vacation destination and why? Jamaica beaches and chill vibes and the jerk chicken.

Where is the wildest place you have had sex? Hotel lobby where everyone walks through.

Favorite sexual position? Lazy Dog.

What do you think of when it comes to Playboy and the iconic bunny? Legendary and the bunny gives sexy vibes.

If you could change any one thing in the world, what would it be and why? For everyone to have free healthcare because everyone should be able to be healthy or have opportunity to be as healthy as they can, with out the stress of dr bills.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? Financially stable, helping others and hopefully having grand babies I can spoil.

LUST FOR LIFE WITH GWEN WONG WAYNE

BY **GWEN WONG WAYNE**

PHOTOS BY **MARIO CASILLI AND GENE TRINDL.**

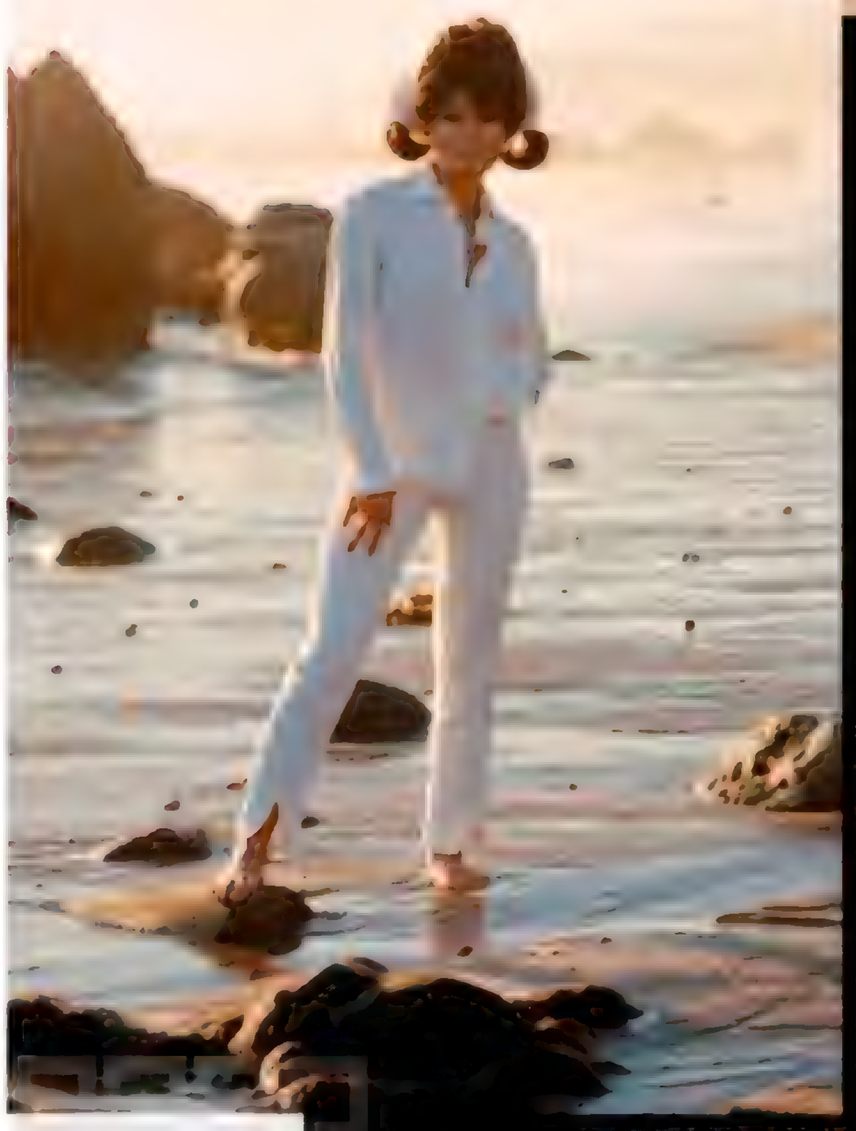
The world-hopping
Bunny and April 1967
Playmate on her
positive outlook, her
plucky persistence
and her quest for a
new kidney

My life started on the other side of the globe in Manila, in 1942. I split my early childhood between the Philippines and Australia, then moved with my family to California when I was seven years old. In San Francisco we became American citizens, and then relocated briefly to Nevada and finally settled in Ohio, where my stepfather opened the first Chinese restaurant in Cincinnati. All this globe-trotting may have sparked my lifelong passion for exploration, and my endless curiosity!

I married young and had a son. My husband and I decided to move our family to Los Angeles, where two years later my daughter came along. Soon I started looking for a paying job. I had never worked a day in my life, but I was determined to earn a living.

My aunt was a Bunny at the Miami and New York Playboy clubs, and she had some great stories to tell about the clientele and great salary. I think she was the catalyst for my career with Playboy. It sounded like a great opportunity, so I sent in some Polaroids. I was asked to come to the Playboy office on Sunset Boulevard and meet with Dick Rosenzweig and Keith Hefner, who immediately asked if I could work at the Miami club. I couldn't leave my children, but Keith

An outtake by Mario Casilli from Gwen Wong's Playmate pictorial.



"I was never into drinking or drugs. I felt that getting high wouldn't solve my problems, and I wanted to be a good role model for my kids and take care of myself."

"Education is so important. Knowledge can get you everywhere and anywhere."

promised that when the L.A. club opened I would be one of the first to get a Bunny suit.

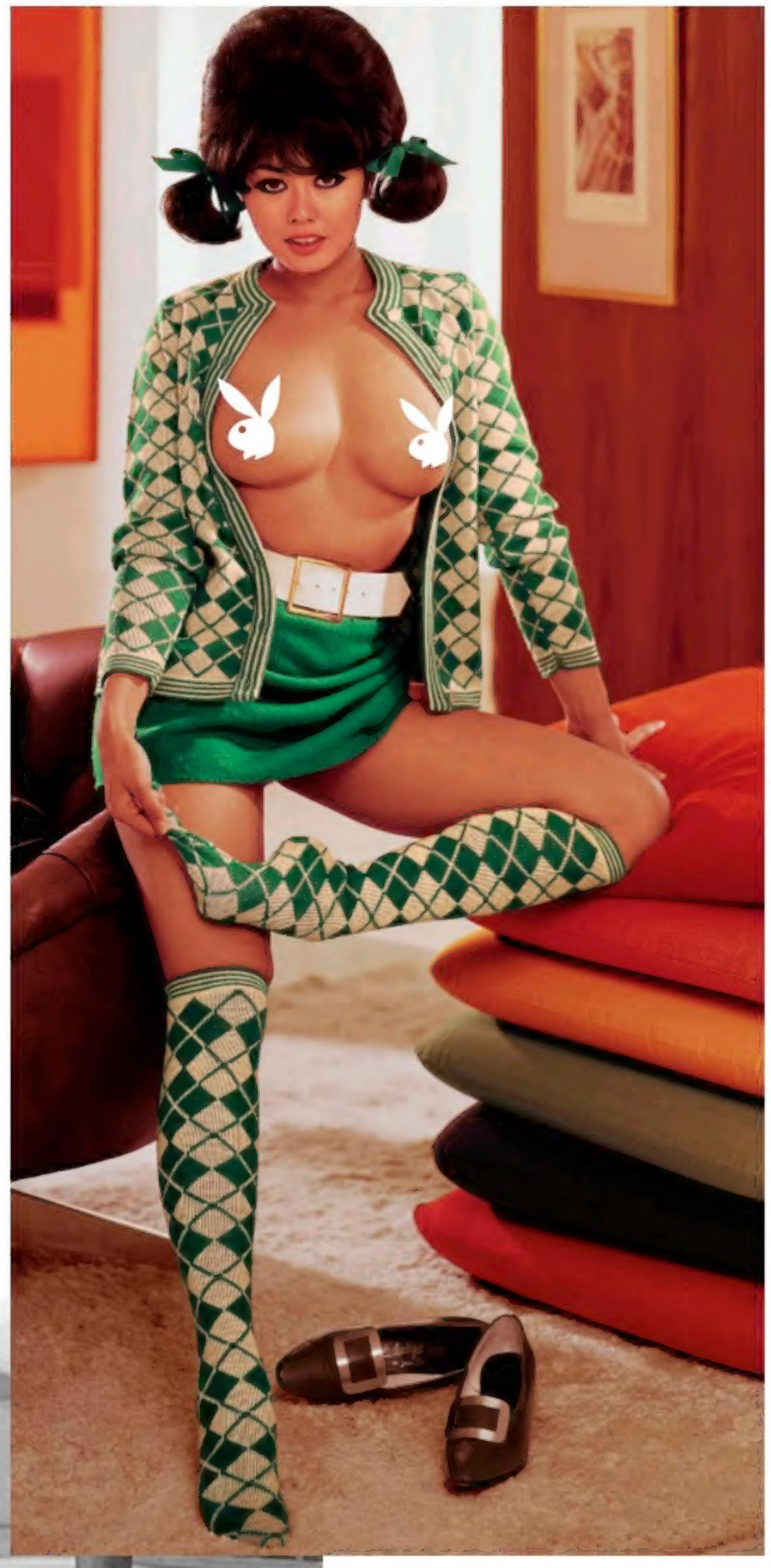
Four years later, when the club was interviewing hundreds of girls, I thought Keith had probably forgotten me. He had not. He was a man of his word, and I was in—yeah! I got a job as a Cocktail Bunny. I was so elated! At first I had a hard time learning all the drink orders, but I got the hang of it and was promoted to Training Bunny—an instructor for the new hires—a year or two later.

Early on I was approached about posing for PLAYBOY, but I was shy, so I rejected the offer. After a few years as a Bunny, my confidence grew and I felt more comfortable with the idea of being a Centerfold model. Soon I was the April 1967 Playmate—Playboy's second Asian American Playmate! Years later, Madonna paid homage to my Centerfold in a Vanity Fair photo. I was impressed; I thought it was great.

After my pictorial came out, I would go to conventions and meet my fans. The "old" Gwen would have been so shy, but working at the Playboy Club gave me the ability to communicate with just about anyone. Everyone was so complimentary, which meant a lot to me. As nice as that was, nothing compares to how I felt getting letters from American soldiers overseas in Vietnam. Their letters were so moving. I still get fan mail from PLAYBOY readers, many of whom weren't even alive in the 1960s. It's very touching, but nothing tops my mail from soldiers.

Two years after I became a Playmate, Playboy bought a luxury jetliner, nicknamed the Big Bunny, and wanted to hire "Jet Bunnies" to work on board. Every night I prayed to be chosen—I wanted to travel so badly! My prayers were answered. As a

One day I was shopping at Tiffany's, and David Bowie walked in. He asked me out, and I turned him down.



"My Centerfold photo! I look back on this image and think, Oh my God, my hair was three feet high!"

"Ever since I was young, I've been a foodie—I love cooking and enjoying food."

Jet Bunny I got to take exciting trips all over, from across the U.S. to Europe to Africa—places I had always dreamed about. I wished I could have been aboard the Big Bunny 24/7, but in between trips I kept my job at the L.A. club.

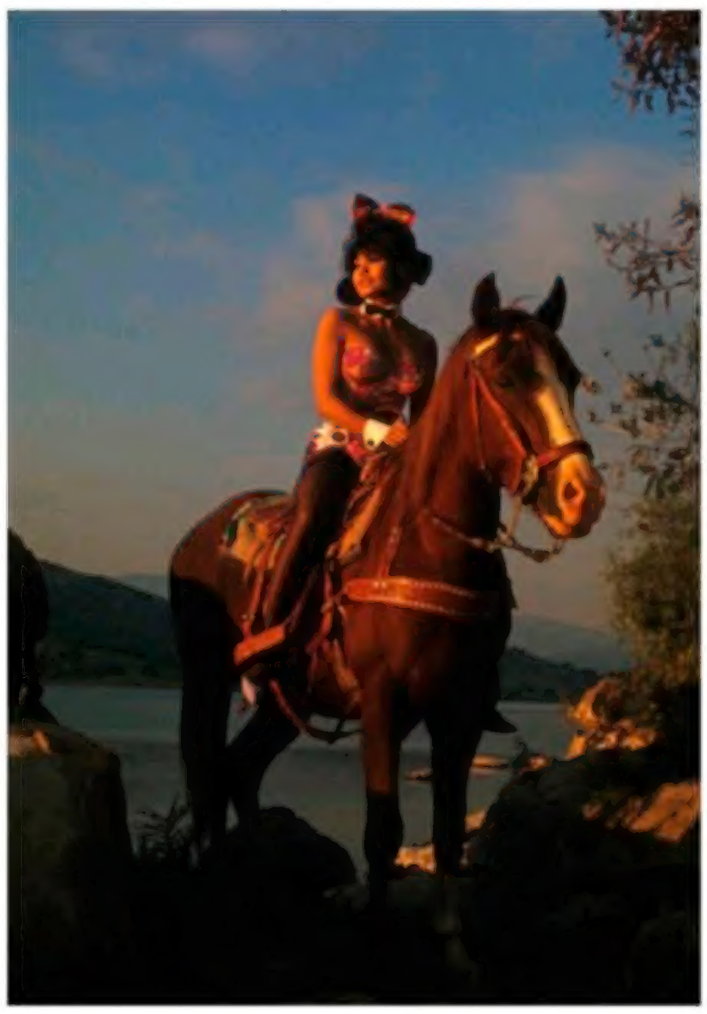
I had plenty of excitement in my life beyond Playboy too. One day I was shopping at Tiffany's, and David Bowie walked in. He asked me out, and I turned him down. Everybody was like, a"Do you know who that was? That was David Bowie!" But I didn't really care—I was too preoccupied with my kids and my work with Playboy to pay it any mind.

I loved being a Jet Bunny, but it was exhausting to co-parent two kids while being so busy traveling for work. I stepped back from the Big Bunny and enrolled at Woodbury University to pursue a bachelor's in interior design—Playboy helped cover some of my tuition and encouraged me to get my degree.

For four years I balanced Bunnyhood, motherhood and my duties as a student. I would wake up at the crack of dawn for class at 7:30, go to school, then shift gears for work, finishing at the club at 2:30 in the morning. Juggling everything was difficult, but earning a college degree was one of the best things I have ever accomplished. I never finished high school, so to earn that degree felt very validating. It's a highlight of my life because I worked so hard for it.

When I graduated, I felt it was time to retire my Bunny ears and tail. Ten years of my life were interconnected with Playboy; it was time for a change. I worked for an architectural firm and then joined CBS as a set-designer apprentice, working on the sets of shows like Cher, All in the Family and Wheel of Fortune. It was fun, but the 18-hour days didn't compel me to stick around.

After I left CBS I marched into a restaurant I liked in West Hollywood and asked for a job. I kept going in and pleading with them until they finally relented and hired me. It wasn't glamorous work—on my first day I had to stem 20 containers of strawberries—but I enjoyed myself. I later became a food tester for Bon Appétit magazine, which was one of my favorite jobs because I've always been a "foodie." (I own more than 3,000 cookbooks!) Eventually I got into silversmithing and jewelry-making. I've always been creative, which I probably got from my mom, a professional pianist and singer.

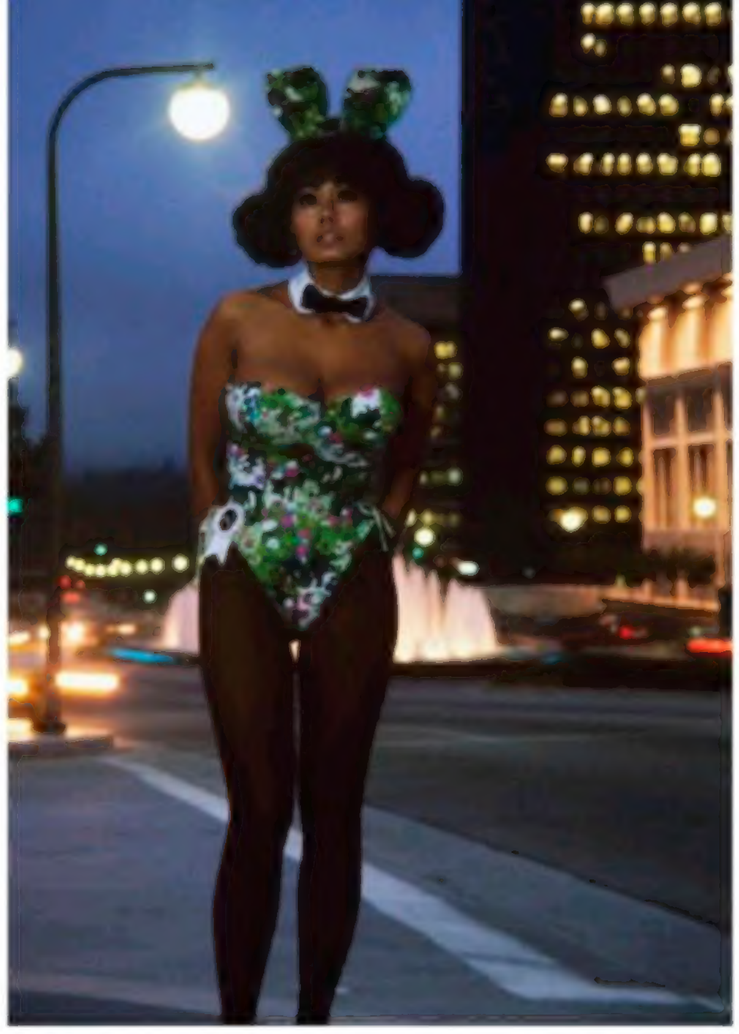


Gwen at the Lake Geneva Playboy Club, photographed by Mario Casilli.

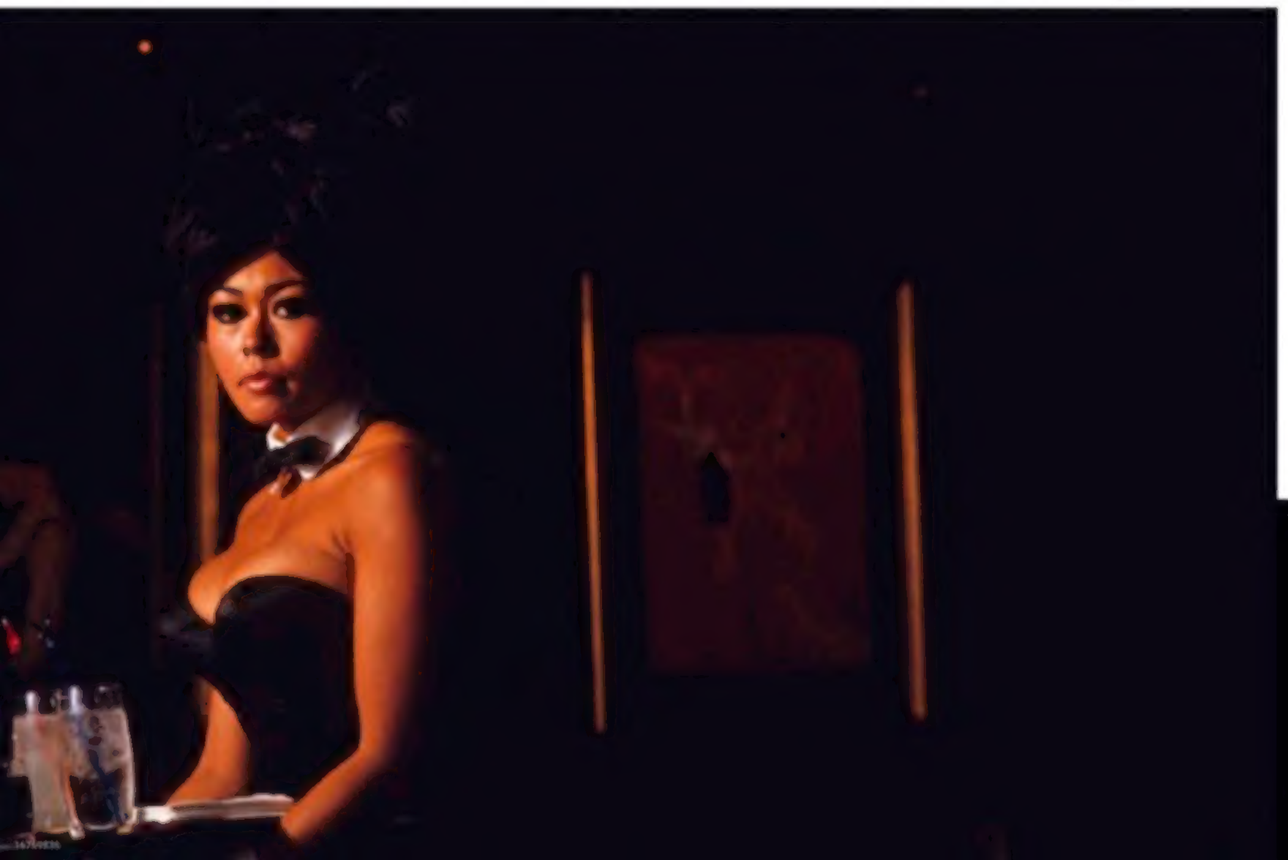
I love learning new things, but I won't stick with something unless it envelops me. The same is true of my relationships—I was married two times, and each time returned to being single because marriage didn't suit me. I'm independent and like making my own decisions. I don't mind being by myself. But I have lost some of my freedom over the past 14 years because I've been coping with serious health issues. I had a disorder called amyloidosis and was later diagnosed with stage-four kidney disease. As a result, I've had to pull back from some of my beloved hobbies, including cooking, gardening, making art and volunteering. Sometimes, I've been able to combine a few of my interests into little projects. I took a six-month gardening class at a local university, then used those skills to teach underprivileged families how to grow and cook healthy food on a small budget.

Family is by far the most important thing to me. My children have sacrificed so much to help me. From morning to night, my son does nothing but take care of me; he is utterly devoted. Most people my age aren't eligible for kidney transplants, but because I've maintained otherwise good health, I'm on the list! I hope to get a kidney soon so I can not only get my life back, but also give my son his life back.

Despite my health worries, I have a very positive outlook on life. That's what keeps me going. No matter what you're going through, you have to appreciate life and everything you've been given. I have never stopped learning, loving, growing and opening my eyes to the magnificent wonders of the world. And I never will.



"The people who came to the clubs were just trying to have fun and enjoy themselves! I never once heard a lewd comment."



"I have art from all over the world around my house—it's a very eclectic collection!"

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